

A JOURNALIST  
AND  
TWO BEARS

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JAMES EDMOND.

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A Journalist and Two Bears.



# A JOURNALIST AND TWO BEARS

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By JAMES EDMOND

(Editor of "The Bulletin.")



SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA:

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Nineteen-thirteen.









JAMES EDMOND.

## Dedication.

This little volume is dedicated with all manner of good wishes to my wife and family, and to my colleagues of THE BULLETIN and THE LONE HAND.

Also it is dedicated with disrespect and loathing to my enemies, including an agent who, in bygone days, let me a house the roof of which leaked in four places, and to a person in a certain far-inland town from whom I once hired a motor-car which took fire and was burned to the ground when 25 miles from any human habitation.

The injuries alluded to are of ancient date, but no opportunity for adequate vengeance having presented itself, they are here put on record in the hope that the evil-doers may read these lines and be stricken by remorse.



## Preface.

These tales made their first appearance in THE BULLETIN, published at Sydney (Australia), or in THE LONE HAND magazine, issued from the same office. Some of them have their basis in a shred or two of fact. Among these are "Todd's Clothes," "The Row in Our Boarding House," "The Midsummer Night's Idyll," and "The Curse of the Lost Soul Mine." The last, despite its apparent improbability, is possibly a little closer to actual fact than any of the others. The remaining stories are presented as mere efforts of the imagination. In particular, the writer desires to say that "The Great Experiment" rests upon no personal experience whatsoever.





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## The Unreal Tale of a Journalist and Two Bears.

IT has been observed by some philosopher in the heavyweight division that for every effect there is a cause, and if we only seek for it with sufficient energy it will be found. The fearsome row that happened one night at St. Kilda, outside-Melbourne, had two causes. One was the unsuccessful attempt of William Johnson to dissolve Parliament at Adelaide; the other was the unfeeling conduct of the Hon. Samuel Bloggs, M.L.C., in seizing the boa-constrictor for back rent.

Johnson was, in his time, almost the most celebrated pressman in Australia. He was a brilliant man, and he had been drunk on every paper of importance in every Australian city. He was so brilliant when sober that even the editor on whose premises he had had his most picturesque and devastating drunk would be found, a couple of years later, holding up a large bowl-like ear that Johnson might pour into it a plausible assurance that he was a changed inhabitant, that the flowing bowl had lost all attractions for him, and that he had learned to shudder at the very mention of lager beer. There was only one editor who never gave Johnson a second hearing, and as Johnson had shoved his head through the window without waiting to open the window this wasn't remarkable.

It was a hot and dreadful day when Johnson tried to dissolve the South Australian Parliament. He was in the press gallery of the Upper House, making a hieroglyphic now and then and dozing between times, and his insobriety was considerable. Things were



ineffably dreary. The Hon. Bildad Smith was pouring obscurity on the provisions of the Bill for Eradicating Surplus Population, and the House longed to get away and be at rest. The Bill for Eradicating Surplus Population died a natural death about 4 p.m. Someone suggested the second reading of the Bill for the Encouragement of Large Estates. Someone else, who felt too exhausted to live any longer, proposed that the House should leave off for the day, and the words fell dimly on the ear of Johnson in the press gallery, like the sound of running waters in a dry land, and made him leap to his feet. In his fear lest the motion should be lost he poured his notes, and his pencil, and another pressman's hat on the bald head of a member sitting below, and waved his arms like a tree in a gale, and spoke:—

“ I proposh,” he said, thickly, “ that thish House adjournsh for ever. Proposh that it never meetsh again. Mister Speaker ”—he spoke appealingly—“ why not chuck it upsh?”—he threw up his hands to illustrate the chucking process. “ You knowsh you're a lot of uselessh old fossilsh. You knowsh yer no good—no good 'tall. You knowsh yer no dashed goodsh. Why not ”—he spoke persuasively—“ why not chuck it right upsh?” He threw up his hands again to show how high he wanted it chucked and upset an inkpot, which drained gently on to a member below. “ Lesh be honesht an' close the whole show, and go out peaceably an' have drinksh, an' give it up as a bad jobsh, an' ”—

An avalanche fell on Johnson. There was a rush of infuriated dignitaries up the stairs. There was a rush down the stairs of Johnson with his hat over his eyes and his arms held by two friendly journalists. The dignitaries coming up the stairs were elderly and short-winded, but bitterly hostile. The pressmen coming down the stairs with Johnson were young, and they were taking three steps at a bound—they couldn't help themselves, because Johnson had lost his footing at the top step, and the dead weight of his tall figure

was dragging them along with him. They didn't want to trample on the Sergeant-at-Arms, or to put their feet on the chest of the doorkeeper, but, once started on their errand of mercy, they couldn't help themselves. The Fourth Estate was in the air when the collision happened, and it hadn't even time to shout a warning or say that it was coming. Johnson had a vague recollection of being in an earthquake and of storming a city, and then he found himself in the street.

"Thish," he said, dreamily, "ish great fun."

"It is," said the man from the evening paper, grimly. "I wish I had left it alone. I trod on the Sergeant-at-Arms coming down, and that'll take a lot of explaining."

"Whatsh nexht thing?" said Johnson in a reverie.

"The next thing," said the evening paper man, "is for you to get down to your office faster than you ever ran before, and see if you can get some money before they hear of this row, for you won't get any after that. And then you'd better take to-night's boat for Melbourne, and don't come back here for two years. No paper in this town will want you till then, and here's a policeman streaming after you already."

Johnson ran. Looking back as he turned the corner he saw the legislators pouring out like bees and gesticulating wildly on the pavement.

That night a muffled individual who was comparatively sober, but not quite sober enough to know if he were wanted for a capital offence or not, carefully avoided the gangway of the steamer and climbed on to the steerage end by a rope. He gave his name as something like "Whish" or "Whoop," and he hid himself behind a pile of fruit cases till the vessel sailed.

In a general way Johnson's intervals of sobriety lasted six months, and his semi-annual "jag" lasted a fortnight. Therefore there were thirteen months in his year. The misfortune in this case was that the "jag" had been interrupted in its third day, and



when the retreating forces of Johnson reached Melbourne in disorder there were still, in the ordinary course of events, nine days of the disturbance to run. He had no plans for taking up the thread of his interrupted "bust"; he just took it up, or it took itself up. The proceeding was assisted by many friends who had heard of his recent doings and thought the conduct of Johnson called for recognition.

There was so much recognition that the end of the first day was a mist with a huge beer pot looming through it and a gaslight making a radiance on the pot. Johnson slept somewhere that night—at least he found himself in an hotel in the morning. The second day was a fog with a whiskey bottle looming through it. The second evening was a thick fog, through which a gigantic hand—which Johnson surmised was his own hand—could be seen reaching out for refreshments. Then he was vaguely aware that oblivion came upon him, but that he didn't fall down; he only set out to walk somewhere.

When he awoke he was looking at a bear. It was very early on a beautiful summer morning, and Melbourne was still asleep. Johnson found himself leaning against a lamp post in Bourke-street, but he was moderately sober, from which fact he assumed that he had been walking most of the night. He studied the bear thoughtfully, and the bear returned the compliment.

"This," said the pressman in a dispassionate tone, "must be a jim-jam."

The bear never moved, but Johnson delivered an address to it.

"You are," he said, "the first bear jim-jam I've seen. I s'pose you're a jim-jam. If you are, you'll preshently become a snake or something. If you keep on being a bear, then s'pose you must be a bear. You sheem to keep on being a bear. It'sh most remarkable."

Something wet licked Johnson's ear from behind. He leaped two feet into the air, and turned round

to find another bear. This time he was angry, and spoke severely.

"Look here, are you a bear or are you not? If you don't explain inside 60 seconds I'll knock your head off."

"Don't, for heaven's sake—don't make that row," said a fretful voice; "and leave my property alone."

Again Johnson leaped into the air. The voice was familiar, but it seemed to come from nowhere, and for a second or two he ascribed it to one of the animals. Then he became aware that he had fallen on a family of three. A small, discouraged-looking man was sitting on the edge of the pavement with his feet in the gutter. He had his hat drawn down over his eyes and his coat-collar dragged up about his ears, and his hands were buried in his pockets. It was Silver, spasmodic pressman—mostly of the free-lance variety—unsaleable poet, occasional showman, theatrical manager and lecturer, and a Bohemian of shifts and expedients. Also, an old friend.

"Leave 'em alone," he said gloomily. "I hate people fooling with my bears."

Johnson shook Silver's hand cordially when he had dragged it out of his pocket, and then he also sat down on the edge of the pavement with his feet in the gutter. The junior bear came and licked his ear again.

"What's up?" Johnson asked briefly.

"Have you got a watch on you? What's the time?" demanded the owner of the bears.

Johnson felt for his watch, but it was gone. He didn't remember where it had gone to.

"It doesn't matter," said the gloomy little man, sinking deeper into his coat. "I only wanted to know how long it was till the pawnshops opened so that I could put the zoological garden up the spout. Have you got half-a-crown?"

Johnson again searched himself, and found nothing.



"You're a hopeful sort of fellow to meet, I must say," almost wailed the small man.

"But what does it all mean?" shouted Johnson. "Where d'ye come from last? What are you wailing about—one would think you were the Book of Jeremiah? And why are you sitting here at four in the morning with two wild animals? What's it all about?"

"Oh, that's easy enough. The 'Agegus' said it didn't want me any more, so I thought I'd take a turn at lecturing. I got Smith for my agent—you know Smith; he gambles—and we went round the small towns, where I delivered an eloquent address on 'The Socialistic Tendencies of the Period' to an average audience of ten."

"I met a man who'd heard it," said Johnson. "He said it was terrible."

"We had to throw it up after the fifth lecture. Then we met Miss Billy Montmorency's dramatic company, and I became manager, while Smith was principal tragedian. They were playing the kind of drama which makes you wish you were dead three times, and they had one set of scenery."

"I've heard of Miss Billy," commented Johnson. "She's an ingenue of 45 with her hair down."

"Well, it was while we were travelling with her that we struck a patch of real luck at last. Smith got a chance to buy a lot of goods cheap—two dancing bears, and a boxing kangaroo, and a stuffed boa-constrictor. We came back to Melbourne and set up a show in this shop here."

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and Johnson, following the motion, noticed a small closed shop covered with bills to the effect that Smith and Silver's unrivalled show was within.

"It lasted ten days. We coined money. I altered my lecture about 'The Socialistic Tendencies of the Period,' to make it fit in with the bears, and it took wonderfully. But Smith wasn't sober once the whole ten days. He had the biggest interest in the show,



and the way he went on was terrible. The bears weren't sober either. The last two days the boxing kangaroo wasn't sober. Smith tried to pour beer into the stuffed boa-constrictor. Last of all he backed a horse with the rent money and lost. The landlord cleared us out last night. He took the boa-constrictor for rent. Smith disappeared round the corner with the kangaroo, and I and the bears hid behind the ash-barrel in the back yard most of the night for fear the police would take away my only asset. We had just come out for a whiff of fresh air when you came along. The ash-barrel smelt something horrible."

Johnson rose like a man inspired.

"Old man, we'll rebuild our fortunes. We'll establish a new firm. I know a pub where my credit's good for one drink each—we mustn't have more than one—and some sandwiches. I know a kind-hearted greengrocer who wouldn't see a fellow-bear go hungry while he had a pound of cabbage in the shop. We'll make our live stock perform in the streets; every copper in Melbourne knows me, and they won't move me on. I'll deliver a brief, impassioned address on bears—you can't lecture worth a cent—while you make the live stock dance and take round the hat. We'll explain afterwards that we did it for a wager of 10,000 dollars with some fool from Chicago. There's any number of them. I know an American here who sells pills for removing large feet; he'll say he made the bet to advertise his pills. I'll get £5 from B. Sloman for the right to paste a bill on the big bear about his unrivalled ready-made pants at 3s. 6d. We'll shake things up, Silver. Whoop!"

"Whoop!" said the depressed man in a whisper.

\* \* \* \* \*

In later years, when Silver had been found again after his disappearance, and when Johnson pondered on the mysterious vanishment of wild animals, their accounts of the one stormy day of their partnership used to differ. I have heard both accounts, and it seems to me the root cause of the trouble was

Johnson's unfinished "jag." As already mentioned, that pressman's semi-annual drunk was wound up for a fortnight, and as only seven days had expired he was a wholly unreliable person, and not to be trusted with either money or beer. Silver had no fixed drinking hours or days—he hadn't even a regular drinking year—but he was a small weak man, and liable to be led astray by anybody at any time. They had both had a bad night, and it was followed by a hot, exciting day, and things happened.

At first all went well. The one drink and the breakfast of sandwiches materialised. The bear food was procured on credit.

B. Sloman was interviewed as soon as his shop opened, and though he would only part £3, and even then insisted on having his cheap pants advertised on the large bear and his four-and-sixpenny hat on the small one, still he put up his money manfully. It was the wild, hilarious boom-time, when Melbourne was gay and riotous, and allowed things to be done that it wouldn't dream of nowadays. The only serious interference that the police put up was about noon, when they ordered B. Sloman's advertisement to be washed off the bears under pain of prosecution for cruelty to animals. It was washed off accordingly at a street tap, and the firm of Johnson and Silver remarked to itself that anyhow Sloman had paid in advance, and had got his money's worth. The bears danced laboriously and badly, but Johnson's address was a great success, and the takings were respectable. And in the afternoon, when profits began to fall off, the little bear put up a sudden, magnificent scrap with a large dog, and raised its popularity to fever heat.

The American who sold the pills which cured large feet was communicated with per telephone (from an hotel bar) about 11 o'clock, and when he got the hang of the situation he took hold of an evening paper reporter, and explained that the eccentric conduct of the two most eminent and brilliant pressmen in



Australia, who were going round Melbourne with a couple of bears, did not arise from intoxication or vagrancy on their part, but was done on the strength of a wager of £2,000 made with the proprietors of Hoofdoker's pills, which were without a rival in either hemisphere, as could be seen by a reference to the printed testimonials. He added that Hoofdoker's spent £100,000 a year in eccentric advertising of this character, in addition to taking up a larger space in the newspapers than any other firm in the trade. Johnson, who didn't want his character as a journalist to go utterly to pieces, read the paragraph in his tenth or twelfth hotel, and it made him feel better, though he said to himself that Hoofdoker seemed to be working the business for all it was worth. Also that grasping person insisted on having his advertisement pasted on the bears—which caused some ill-feeling, but nothing to speak of. About 4 o'clock, after he had got rid of Hoofdoker, Johnson dropped into his seventeenth hotel for a drink. He didn't remember coming out, and he doesn't remember it to this day.

\* \* \* \*

It appeared to be after an illimitable interval that he heard voices. One of them seemed to be delivering a lecture on bears—a lecture which had grown so familiar with repetition that it had become a weariness.

Other voices were raised in coarse, mirthful aspersion. Johnson realised after a while that the first voice was his own. He was in a threepenny bar somewhere, and was applauding his own remarks with a pewter pot on the counter while he harangued an increasing crowd of customers. The two bears roosted in a serious frame of mind on a form, and an affable but irreverent mob was offering them biscuits, cheese, beer, and sundries. They seemed to be taking everything that was going.

The clock said it was 9 p.m.—that left nearly five hours unaccounted for. Johnson sidled to the door without interrupting his discourse, and glanced out.



T. A. J. 1892

"The two bears roosted in a serious frame of mind on a form."



He knew the locality—it was down by St. Kilda. That meant that several miles of macadamised road were unaccounted for. Silver—well, apparently, he was unaccounted for; at least, he was nowhere to be seen. Johnson felt in his pockets, and realised about a pound's worth of small coin. Apparently most of the day's takings and the bulk of the money which B. Sloman had spent in advertising on the bears had gone somewhere—but where? Johnson felt anxious and lonely.

The crowd reminded Johnson rather crossly that it was waiting.

Johnson asked what on earth it was waiting for.

The explanation, given with various degrees of anger, was not very lucid, but from it the showman concluded that he was in something of a difficulty. Apparently the address which he had been giving when he came to himself had purported to be the introduction to a marvellous performance by the animals. The performance was to be absolutely unique. He had punctuated his sentences by smiting the counter with the pot, and the pot was a ruin. The landlord made no disguise of the fact that unless a high-class performance was forthcoming the damage done to the pot would require a great deal of explanation.

Johnson rose to the occasion as best he could, and sternly ordered the smaller bear to dance. The smaller bear prospected with one paw for a flea on its stomach, and treated its temporary owner as if he were dead. He ordered the large bear to dance. It shambled over to the counter and held up its nose for a biscuit. Somebody poured beer over its nose, and it snorted. Apparently, though they would dance to please Silver, they took no stock in strangers, and refused to recognise Johnson. The landlord intimated that he expected ample cash satisfaction for the battered pot. One man said he would fight Johnson if that would do any good.

By a blessed dispensation of Providence there is,

in almost every assemblage, a peacemaker. There was one on this occasion—a tall young man with a striped collar. He winked eloquently at the crowd when Johnson wasn't looking, and the crowd became still and awaited developments. He urged that the animals were probably tired, and not quite at their best. He recommended peace and brotherly love. Finally, he shouted for Johnson, and said that if that gentleman would give them the speech all over again they would call things square, and there would be no ill-feeling. And while Johnson was still consuming the liquor the young man in the striped collar gently led the small bear into the middle of the road, faced it towards Melbourne, and gave it a hearty kick. The small bear uttered a yelp of surprise, and shambled off towards the city. Then the tall young man surreptitiously led out the large bear, faced it towards Gippsland, and smote it hard on the tail with an empty bottle. It uttered a kind of "wuff!" and lighted out for the mountains. Then the peacemaker doubled up in agonies of silent laughter.

The crowd inside had covered the retreat of the live stock with another drink, and Johnson was again going strong. His lecture on bears generally was an impassioned piece of oratory, equal to Cicero's denunciation of Cataline or the impeachment of Warren Hastings. His long arms cleared a wide space round him as he gesticulated fiercely with the beer-pot till it was worn out. It was 10 o'clock when he reached his peroration—

"And, finally—hic—gentlemen—thesh faithful, intelligent and devoted——"

He reached out his hand as he spoke and patted the empty air where the larger devoted animal had been. Then he glared. The guffaw that went up was like the roar of a cataract. The peacemaker outside doubled up again with mirth.

"Them faithful animals of yours," said the landlord briefly, "went out of the door half-an-hour ago."



"I heard someone screaming 'murder!' down the road," said the peacemaker between his paroxysms. "I expect they're killing somebody."

Johnson expressed his opinion of the company in one glittering curse, threw his beer pot into the middle of next century, and ran through the doorway. The moon was shining, and the lamps were alight, but neither to right nor left did the illumination show a black object shambling up the road or down. It was late and lone and silent. The peacemaker, still struggling with his stupendous joke, intimated that the cries of "murder" had come from "that way"—and pointed vaguely towards Gippsland and Maoriland and the territories of the Chilian Republic.

Then Johnson uttered an arrangement of ground and lofty swearing that is remembered thereabouts to this day, and the fist at the end of his long arm smote the peacemaker on the waistbelt. The peacemaker doubled up with a yelp and flew backwards.

The journalist was a man of action when he started. He ran like a hare to the next corner, and looked up and down the long roads that lay white and silent in the moonlight. There was no bear.

He turned to the left and ran to the next corner. Very long and white and straight are the highways thereabouts, and on a clear night things can be seen very far off. Still no bear.

The idea that his animals might have reverted to a wild state and be doing all manner of damage worried him. Besides, it seemed like larceny as a bailee. He ran two more blocks, and looked up and down more long white roads, all to no purpose. Finally, in his anxiety, he roused up a villa residence and asked if any bears had been seen thereabouts that evening. A terrified girl, who evidently regarded him as a dangerous lunatic and a person to be humored, assured him that though no bears had called an elephant had just passed, and she pointed out the road it had taken and urged him to pursue it at once. She said that if he ran fast he couldn't fail to overtake it. Then she

shut the door gently, and Johnson heard her having hysterics inside. He went out and closed the gate and tore his hair.

He met a policeman and asked if he had seen any bears. The officer was an unusually small one. He realised that the inquirer was a tall, sinewy man who looked excited and might be troublesome if roused. So he replied civilly that all bears found wandering around loose were taken to the police station. He said that some days there were as many as a dozen there at one time, and suggested that he and Johnson should go along together and sort out Johnson's bears from the collection. As he said it his hand took an insidious hold on the other man's sleeve. Johnson shook him off and ran. He had no time to waste when £30 worth of lost bear was getting more lost every moment, and people were possibly being eaten up in all directions. And he wasn't taking any chances of going to police stations, and being locked up as a lunatic by some fatuous constable, and having the story in the papers next morning. He was sobered by much running, and he admitted, as he leaned against a tree to get his second wind, that he had made enough history during the last few days.

He went into an hotel just before closing time and braced himself with two whiskies. Also he bought a flask to keep him up during the night that was ahead of him. It was a lonely hotel, and when he asked if any bears had been seen thereabouts the girl served him with fear and trembling.

In a house down a quiet, tree-lined road in Elsternwick he heard a disturbance which sounded hopeful. He knocked firmly on the door and asked for his bears. Water was poured on him from a top window.

He emptied the flask after that, and became again, for a time, full of Dutch courage. He raged through Elsternwick, Balaclava, and adjacent suburbs, and wherever he saw a light he knocked up the inhabitants and asked for his menagerie. Mostly he got a civil



response, but at one house water was again poured over him from a balcony, and Johnson told the inhabitants that this sort of thing was liable to become monotonous. His blood was up, and he demanded an apology. None being forthcoming, he broke the bow window with a large clod of earth. A dog came round the corner of the house and went for him, but he knocked it out in one round, and threw it over the tank.

By 1 a.m. the police of four suburbs were scouring the highways and bye-ways in search of a lengthy monomaniac about whom conflicting stories were afloat. The only reason why they didn't find him was that Johnson had left the roads by this time, and was devoting himself to a vigorous search of all the back gardens he could get into.

About 2 a.m. he got back by accident to the St. Kilda-road, and gave it up. He was tired beyond all expression, he was unspeakably dry, and the earth had apparently opened up and swallowed his two animals. He sat down on the edge of the pavement and told the universe that he declined to travel any further. The moon set. Johnson decided that some belated vegetable cart would be along soon from Brighton, and he would negotiate a lift. If no vegetable cart came he would wait for the first tram. Then he slept.

A bear passed him in his dreams, but he heeded not.

About four he was awakened by the approach of something that looked like a black omnibus, and he hailed it. The driver said that for a shilling he could get in lengthwise by the back door, the same way as the "stiff 'un" did, and he would be taken to Melbourne. Johnson then realised that he had hailed a belated hearse, but by that time all things seemed alike, and he got in. The vehicle dropped him in Bourke-street, almost opposite the signboard of Smith and Silver's unrivalled show, and Johnson said to himself that this coincidence was the last straw.

The bears were never accounted for, and Silver, when he turned up again, accused Johnson of stealing the property, and the old friendship went to pieces. Also, Silver sued Johnson for his bears, but about this stage of the proceedings Smith, who quitted the narrative when he disappeared round the corner with the boxing kangaroo, made his re-entry, and sued Silver for his share of the bears, and for an account of the day's takings. Silver sued him in return for half the boxing kangaroo, which Smith had sold to a fourpenny restaurant for soup, and a side issue arose about the legality of the seizure of the stuffed serpent. Johnson, who hated publicity in his lucid moments, compromised with Silver for 10s., but the other cases went on indefinitely.

## The Blessings that would Befall if I were King.

I WOULD raise a marble palacè by a patch of golden  
shore;  
I'd hang a great monopolist beside the golden  
door;

If anyone used " language " in all my wide domain  
I'd fine him—and I'd slay the miscreant if he swore  
again;

I would build a noble capital beside a river wide,  
And white-winged fleets would float upon that river's  
glassy tide;

And beauty, art, and culture to this country would  
I bring—

If I were King.

On the pavement of my capital none would  
expectorate;

I'd suspend the man who did so at the city's brazen  
gate;

I'd oil the wheels of industry to ease life's toil and fret;  
The income-tax I'd double to pay off the Public Debt;  
The civil servants' wages would be multiplied by three;  
I would send a swift assassin to look up the Absentee;  
And from my palace tower his skull would dangle on  
a string—

If I were King.



The arid wastes and deserts I would widely irrigate  
 (If the person with rich acres didn't pay his water-rate  
 I would hang him in the morning—in the morning  
     cool and grey,  
 And his bones would be a warning at the breaking of  
     the day).

And he who wrote a drama re a father old and bent,  
 And a daughter who was Lost, likewise a Missing  
     Document,  
 And a villain with a large cheroot—he'd from the  
     gibbet swing—

If I were King.

I'd extinguish lanes and alleys, and I'd purify the slum;  
 I would slay the miscreant early who compounded  
     bogus rum;

I would run the country with a single House of  
     Parliament;

On cool evenings I would slaughter him who raised  
     the widow's rent;

The importer man would moulder in a lonesome  
     winding-sheet,

His belltopper would be jumped upon by beggars in  
     the street;

And many sour and cranky preachers I would bury  
     in the Spring—

If I were King.

My armed minions would go swiftly through the high-  
     ways after dark,

And the Push would lie at daybreak in the bye-ways  
     stiff and stark.

The pigeon-shooting person, and the bookie, and the pug  
 Would be slain in secret places by the empire's Public  
     Thug.

I'd build dwellings for the aged, and the widows, and  
     the blind;

The outcast and the orphan would in me a father find;  
 And homeless dogs would to me as a friend and helper  
     cling—

If I were King.

He who toiled at evening up a hill in my imperial town  
Might note something like a pumpkin that rushed past  
him going down,

And he'd know it was the severed head of the nefarious  
gent

Who lent money to the poor at several hundred pounds  
per cent.

And if, when he had breathlessly ascended to the top,  
He chanced to find a body lying dead, he needn't stop;  
He'd understand it was a sweater, and he'd go his way  
and sing—

If I were King.

He who sought to borrow money for the development  
Of our "national resources" would be in a dungeon  
pent,

And the Public Thug would take him who made Patent  
Medicine

To the sea, and tie a kedge to him, and firmly drop  
him in.

I'd abolish wooden shanties, broken fences, and the like;  
Likewise the evil-minded cove who scorches on a bike;  
Also all things that were smellful, ugly, foul, and  
mouldering—

If I were King.

The blessed light of Heaven—light of sun and moon  
and stars—

Would never shine again on him who vended bad cigars.  
And all who took home whisky, in a bottle or a jug,  
Would be bailed up on the highway by the zealous  
Public Thug;

If the liquor proved inferior the cash would be returned,  
And the hostelry that sold it to a pile of ashes burned,  
And the license cast unto the winds as an infected  
thing—

If I were King.

But at night I'd hang my crown upon a nail fixed in  
the wall,

And authors would hold revelry within my palace hall;  
And bards and sculptors bring the Beer from under-  
neath the Throne,

While intoxicated artists 'neath the table would lie  
prone.

Each man of all that gathering would hold his  
jewelled mug

With champagne to be replenished by the gladsome  
Public Thug;

And the shouts of the Bohemians would make tower  
and turret ring—

If I were King.



## The Degraded Proceedings Connected with the Row in Our Boarding-House.

THE trouble began on the night when a newly-imported youth named Percy appeared at our boarding-house. There were ten of us there before his arrival, including Ben, the homorous Polish tailor, who was vaguely understood to have thrown bombs at all the royal families of Europe, and then gone into exile. We paid seventeen shillings a week each, not including washing; and we lived riotously on boiled mutton. There were more empty beer-bottles in the bedrooms, and more laughter, and more grease slopped on the floor, and the candle-ends got into the soup oftener in that boarding-house than in any other I ever heard of. Also, the neighbors got less sleep than anybody ever did in the vicinity of any other boarding-house. The dining-room had not been papered since the beginning of history, and the landlady had only one eye. Her daughter had recently eloped with a non-union printer. She (the landlady) was aged about 40, and wore a green dress, and in the evenings she used to sing songs to us with her hair down. These few details will convey a reasonably good idea of the nature of that Bohemian establishment.

One windy evening in March the landlady had agitated the bell on the stairs, as was her custom. Her weapon was a sort of cow-bell, and as she wrestled with it on the murky staircase she looked like a witch dancing on a heath. Her arms, her hair,

her feet, her green dress, and her trodden-down shoes flew in eight different directions, and her one eye and the bell flew in two more. Strangers coming down in the dark, and meeting this apparition without notice, generally took her for a heap of excited boa-constrictor or an immense octopus leaping on the top step. Poor old agitated female—she is dead now. She broke her neck in the passage one day rushing down to look at a funeral. But if she had kept on ringing that dinner-bell she would have been immortal. Death couldn't have aimed straight enough to hit her in her gambols.

I rushed down to the dining-room at the first signal, and meeting Bem and two more coming tumultuously in the opposite direction we got jammed in the doorway. I was just going to pass some uncomplimentary observations when we all caught sight of a spectacle such as the oldest individual in that boarding-house had never seen before. A great calm descended upon us, and we disentangled ourselves and went in silently.

What I saw was an object like a naked infant's hindleg, resting in a careless, graceful attitude along the back of a chair. There was a bracelet on it, and attached to one end of it was a woman. She was attired in a silk dress which exposed her right down to the fifth knob of her spine, or thereabouts, and she had a necklace, and an eyeglass, and sundry rings. There was a frozen expression in her eye—a look of cold derision that seemed to fall like a curse upon the whole company. This was Percy's wife. Percy himself was there in a tail-coat, and a tremendous collar, and another eye-glass, and he had a silver bangle on his wrist. He was the first male human being that I ever saw inside a bangle, and I am prepared to swear that he was the very first who ever wore a bangle in a boarding-house.

Between them they made just one remark all dinner-time. It was "Haw!" I could have said the same thing myself if I had been dead.



We did not eat much that evening, and there was very little conversation. We were all paralysed by the spectacle of Percy and his wife. They kept looking in a pensive, perplexed sort of way round the table as if they were searching for some of the commonest necessities of life, such as were to be found in stacks in their ancestral castle; and then they would wake up as if from a dream, and recollect suddenly that they were castaways in a savage land, where the aborigines never heard of the article, whatever it might be. And when they were finished the lady went and smote the piano with an arm of might for about 38 minutes, after which the pair retired and were seen no more that night.

That was the beginning of the row in our boarding-house.

Next morning the owner of the establishment came down early, and refreshed herself with a few melodies before breakfast. She was a strange, promiscuous, half-savage female, and was wont at times to get up before daybreak and thud out all manner of lost chords on the keyboard, and she would keep time with her slippers and her head, and whirl her tangled locks in the air, and cast the tails of her dressing-gown out behind her in a frenzy of inspiration. After that she would scuttle away with a prodigious clatter, and clutch the sausages that were to be fried for breakfast, and for about half-an-hour the air would be darkened with a chaos of food and dishes, and it would blow a gale of gravy, cruets, loaves, and similar properties. When she entered with the breakfast tray it always made me think of Napoleon's commissariat department flying from Moscow, for she generally arrived at a gallop, shoving one-half of the provisions in front of her and dragging the other half behind, and hissing to scare off the cat, which ran with its tail up in the rear of the procession, trying vainly to claw at the alleged eatables.

Then she would fling herself on the bell like a hash-housekeeper possessed, and make a riot that was

calculated to wake the lost souls of all the dead boarders who had shaken off this mortal coil and were eating spectral ham and eggs amid the fields of Asphodel. On this morning I found her leaping and gambolling on the stairs as usual, and I stopped to propound a solemn question.

"Mrs. Jones," I said sternly, "who are the partially-dressed intruder in the bed-furniture and the tailor's advertisement with the jewellery on his fore-leg?"

"He's in the gas office," she replied in gasps, as she threw herself up against the air with the bell. "Newly married. He's English, and got £100 a year. I took them in at a reduced rate."

"Oh, you did! Now, look here; have you any reason to suppose he's a duke or an emperor, or anything of the sort?"

"No!"

"Do you suppose, as a respectable Christian woman, that he's got a castle anywhere?"

"No, I don't s'pose he has."

"Did he come in with the Conqueror, now?"

"There wasn't anybody with him when he came in, that I saw."

"And did you know when you took them in that she was going to stick so far out of her clothes?"

"No, I didn't. If I'd knowed it I'd have thrown her away."

I went into breakfast in a subdued mood. Percy was there looking with a shocked expression at the sausages, and shuddering in a new bangle and a collar that was six sizes taller than the previous one. His wife, with a fresh bracelet, was glaring at the same viand, and the expression in her eye seemed to say "Where am I? Is this a horrid dream?" It was the only morning, too, in six months when the sausages hadn't either fallen under the grate or been dropped on the stairs, and this made their conduct all the more uncalled for.

At lunch time Percy's wife appeared in another fresh bracelet, and with a profusion of jewellery on her right forefinger. And as for Percy, astounding as it may seem, he had a third bangle on. Evidently he had one for each meal, and this was his lunch bangle.

In the evening the lady had another silk dress on, and it exposed one knob more of her spine than the previous one. Percy wore his second clean collar and his dinner bangle, and his small countenance, looming over his great expanse of shirt-front, looked like a pallid bird of prey on the top of an icy mountain. They talked together in scraps of inferior French, and when the meal was over Mrs. Percy again smote the piano, and then retired coldly to her own apartments.

That night we held an indignation meeting on the balcony. The landlady had deposited the vegetable dish out there through the window when she was getting ready to make her turbulent entry with the pudding, and had forgotten it. Inside there were two candles burning, and one lamp with a broken shade—the gas had been cut off for non-payment. The bread was in a plate on top of the piano, and the dishes were in an unwashed condition downstairs, and the mistress of the house was singing a shrill melody in the kitchen. And among these surroundings Bem, the Polish tailor, passed a resolution that he would drive Percy off the premises, or die in the attempt. After that our souls felt relieved, and we settled down to harmony. Somebody found some liquor in a bottle under his bed and brought it down. The cards were fished out, and we played nap, and gave each other I.O.U.'s on a lavish scale. The lamp flickered and passed away with an awful smell. Then one of the candles died amid a tremendous blob of grease, and we gave up playing, and smoked in the semi-darkness. The bread cast a long, gaunt shadow on top of the piano, and the vegetable dish was forgotten on the balcony. And, finally, our landlady



burst in with the green dress partially open at the back, and wearing a hat decorated with six broken feathers, and fell over the cat in the doorway, and she played some tune that was all discords, while Bem sang a dirge about some forgotten period when he lived beside a river, and went out musing with a female by moonlight. He was so moved by the recollection that he wept into the last candle, and it went out also, leaving us in darkness.

I woke on that third morning of the history of Percy with a vague, indefinable feeling that somebody had died in the night. There was a Sabbath calm brooding over Jones's boarding-house which was quite foreign to that clamorous establishment, and as I listened it suddenly occurred to me that Bem must have carried out his threat, and dynamited Percy in the darkness. All the doors seemed to close softly, instead of shutting with a soul-destroying bang as usual. The landlady flopped about gently on her trodden-down shoes, instead of bringing in the breakfast with a crash and a shriek, and shedding dishes about in all directions; and she rang the bell gently, whereas she usually rang it like a dray-load of escaped lunatics. I descended the stairs amid a prevailing smell of ham and eggs, and went into the dining-room.

Percy was breakfasting with a troubled expression and a bangle, and his wife was glaring across the table. Opposite them Bem was solemnly feeding in evening dress. He looked absolutely vacant, and seemed to be lost in profound thought, and the frantic excitement of the other eight boarders made no impression on him at all. He wore a pair of kid gloves and a bracelet, and his moustache was elegantly waxed. Percy rose at last, and walked round this apparition, but the apparition never moved. Finally the Pole got up, and thoughtfully dragged an ancient, battered straw hat from under his chair, and having jammed it hard down on his head he went out of the room and out of the house like a man who was lost in profound vacancy.



Nobody spoke. A species of paralysis seemed to have descended on that boarding-house. But, after a moment, Percy rushed on to the balcony and glared in a cataleptic fashion after this unaccountable visitant. And outside, on the stairs, stood a petrified landlady in a smudged green dress, and with a hat that had six broken feathers in it, cocked rakishly over one eye, and two misfit shoes that seemed to have taken root in the floor. She held a teapot in one hand and a pie in the other, and she was unconsciously pouring the tea into the pie, and the pie on to the staircase.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bem turned up in evening costume again at lunch, but, though expectation rose to fever-heat, nothing happened. Owing to mental strain, however, the landlady fainted in the sink in the course of the afternoon.

At dinner the Percy family began to show signs of wear and tear. Mrs. Percy's left eyebrow was out of line, and her complexion had shifted round to her ear. Evidently it had been put on with a reckless hand while the wearer was under the influence of considerable excitement. Her husband had an enraged and harassed look, and his hair was off the straight, and his tie was crumpled.

The landlady's shoes were in the hall, from which I gathered that she had lost them in her agitation, and her hat was under the table. As for that joyous Bohemian herself, she was dodging round in a semi-hysterical condition, and when I entered she had just given Percy the whole dish of potatoes, and had shoved the entire joint on another boarder's plate, after which she deposited the kettle in an abstracted manner on the table-cloth. Then she fled unaccountably round the table and supplied us all with a number of other remarkable things too numerous and too badly assorted to mention. There was a dead and awful silence in the company—a silence that was too

awful to be accounted for on the supposition that Bem had appeared again in evening dress and caused a panic. For one awful moment the thought occurred to me that the insane Pole might possibly have appeared clothed in a marked scarcity of dress of any kind.

He entered at that moment, carefully removing a shiny bell-topper as he came in, and depositing a pair of gloves in its inmost recesses. He was attired in grey pants and a linen jacket, but he had taken the sleeves out of the jacket and out of his shirt, and he was "cut low" at the neck. Also he wore a gold bracelet—in fact, he was a remarkably good copy of Percy's wife. The landlady uttered a shriek when she saw him, and disappeared down the stairs. The cat escaped up the chimney, scattering last night's dead ashes out of the grate as it went. The other boarders choked with insane glee, but Bem only contemplated them for an instant with a lack-lustre eye and a funereal visage, and sat down. He was the one unmoved individual in the company.

Then Percy arose, and shaking a fork in the air with a palsied hand, he made a brief oration.

"I give notice," he shrieked, "that I will leave this den of infamy at the end of the week. I am accustomed—I mean, I am not accustomed—British constitution—degraded parody upon a human being—I refuse to associate—I—dash and confound the—the—objectionable ruffian opposite—insolent outrage upon all gentlemanly sentiment—gorilla on the other side of the table——"

He gave out there, and choked. With a wild howl he heaved up the table and capsized the ruins of it bodily on Bem, and then he tramped heavily over the debris and engaged his enemy in mortal combat. The Pole emerged from the wreckage, and with his hair full of gravy, and corned beef in both ears, and one eye stopped up with cabbage, and mustard streaming down his back, he flew at Percy like a wild cat. The candles went out. Mrs. Percy

shrieked in the passage. The landlady wailed dismally in the kitchen. All was horror and confusion.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was an item in Percy's bill when he left, which read: "Broken crockery, 22s. 6d." I believe he hypothecated his lunch bangle to pay it. The gas has been turned on again since then, and the landlady sings weird songs to us in the gloaming, with her hair down as of old. She wears the same green dress, and drops her shoes all over the house as before, but it isn't the same landlady—the old one broke her neck on the stairs as beforementioned, and her daughter has inherited her clothes and the business, and she rings the dinner-bell with even more vim than her lamented predecessor. She reminds me very much of her mother, for she drops the meals on the stairs in a way that calls up sad, pathetic memories; and rushes in as recklessly holding out the gravy in front of her, and rushes out again as madly to look for the vegetables, as her deceased relative could have done. Percy is in gaol somewhere—there was a gap in his accounts which even his jewellery could not fill. His wife eloped with our new landlady's husband, the non-union printer. Also nobody wears evening dress in our boarding-house any more.



## The Vision of the Ghost that Walked.

I WAS very ill with an inflamed lung, and through most of the slow night I lay awake and wondered if there was ever going to be daylight again. In between times I dozed for a minute or two and dreamed that I was dead.

It was always the same dream. I had it on an average six times each night, until I took to opiates, and even then I slept with a vague consciousness that the dream was somewhere about and might break through the opiate at any moment. I think I had that vision about 200 times all told, and it never varied in one particular.

I had just died and was standing at the edge of a round pit which seemed to go down to the bottom of Infinity. A pleasant, soft light rose from somewhere in the endless Below. It was the only light thereabouts; everything else was a plain of some inky substance, adorned only by a very faint, greenish twilight that came from nowhere in particular. A smooth spiral pathway led down into the excavation, and I started downwards. There was no compulsion of any kind, no argument, no person with a tail or a pitchfork—nothing. I started down simply because it never seemed to occur to me not to start down. In some shapeless fashion or other I was aware that if it did occur to me not to go down I could stay where I was or go somewhere else, yet, at the same time, I seemed to know that it wasn't going to occur to me. So I went.

The centuries rolled on and I was still going down. I never grew tired. I never met anyone. There



wasn't a sound or a whisper, or the faintest suggestion of an echo in all that descent. The light still kept ahead, and all the time I knew I was at perfect liberty to go back to the top if I wanted to. Also, I knew that I didn't want to, and never would want to, and that I never would take the slightest interest in the matter.

The spiral track ended at last, after an aeon or two, in a passage. That also sloped gently downwards; it was about ten feet high and as many feet broad, and about 1000 miles long, lined everywhere with brown, polished wood, and with the same light at the further end of it. When I arrived at the end another passage struck off at right angles. It sloped gently downwards and had a light at the end of it, and it was the exact duplicate of the first one. And millions more exactly similar passages followed. Some were 1000 miles long and some 1000 times longer than that.

I walked steadily on at the same pace. In all the millions of years I had been walking I had never met anybody, and I knew somehow that in all Futurity I never would meet anybody. I never heard anything, either, and I was perfectly well aware that I never would hear anything. I knew that I was going nowhere except to more passages, each one just the same as the last, and just the same as the next. I was aware, somehow or other, that the ghost who had died before me was walking along at exactly the same steady pace as myself in some other passage countless miles ahead, and that the ghost who had died just after me was doing his ceaseless tramp countless miles behind, and that the ghost which had died after him was on the spiral staircase, and would get to the first passage by-and-bye. I knew, also, that the ghost behind would never catch up to me so that we might be two ghosts together and keep each other company, and I knew equally well that I would never catch up to the ghost in front, but neither fact troubled me to any extent. We would all walk apart like this for all

Eternity, and that fact wholly failed to interest me. So I went on walking, and the silence continued in full blast, and the light at the end of the passage was always ahead, and whether there was a similar light behind me I didn't know, for I never looked back. I could have looked back if it had struck me to do so, but it never did strike me.

Since then I have been hunting up other people who habitually dream about the place above mentioned, and have made the acquaintance of two. One is accountant in a bank, and every half-year, when they are cooking the balance-sheet, he dreams a dream every night.

His idea is that he is out on a plain. The earth underfoot is black and perfectly smooth. The sky above is greenish-black, but a red light appears on the horizon far ahead. He walks steadily towards it—he and armies of other ghosts—but they never get any nearer. None of them speak to each other. Their fleshless feet make not the slightest sound. There is no wind, no change in the black ground or the greenish-blue sky, no variation of any kind—nothing but long ranks of ghosts that extend out of sight on either hand, and ranks in front as far as the eye can reach, and ranks behind of which there is no end, all keeping pace in the same absolutely invariable goose-step towards the red light that never comes any nearer. He also knows that he is never to get there, yet never going to stop going there, but he doesn't complain.

The other dreamer I have met is a girl of 22. She took to dreaming of Gehenna when she was studying logarithms at college, and she had to give up logarithms to get rid of the vision. Then it took to coming on her again when she was trying to raise  $X$  to its ninth power, or something, and she had to give up that also. Now she only has the vision occasionally.

The Gehenna she gets to in the night, when her glossy brown head is troubled on her pillow, is a straight road running gently downhill. It is black



underfoot as if it was made of coal-dust rolled hard. There is a high bank, also apparently of coal-dust, on each side but she never goes up this bank to see what lies beyond. There are no trees, no houses, no curves in the road, no grass or herbs; nothing but a straight black streak going gently downhill over the face of a black land, with a glimmer of twilight overhead. Along this road she drives slowly behind a black horse. She is dressed in black, to be in keeping with the rest of the scenery, and every now and then, at long intervals, she drifts past a milestone which says it is forty billion leagues to somewhere. She can never stop long enough to see where it is that distance to, but she is troubled with an inward conviction that if she can get to some place, the name of which she doesn't know, she will be at rest, and she badly wants to find out the name of the place on the milestone, in the hope that it will look as if it might be the same name as the place she wants to get to. Only she never can stop long enough to find it out. She always resolves to stop next time, yet when she gets to the next milestone she goes past it just the same. Also she is troubled with an idea that there is only one milestone all the time, and that she is walking round and round a little black globe and passing it continuously, and getting no further forward.

Her case is worse than the other two, for now and then the black horse insists on getting into the vehicle, which is a kind of tumbril or vegetable cart, and then she has to harness herself up and drag the outfit. These occasions are rare, but very unpleasant. For the horse produces strong drink from some unknown receptacle and gets the horrors, and then he grows abusive and makes her gallop. Sometimes she gallops for three months at a stretch. And at the end of that time she is only making a desperate pace through the non-existent City of Nowhere and there is the same old milestone.



## The True and Historical Narrative of the Forty Thieves.

**T**HERE were Forty Thieves in Bagdad in a bygone  
centuree,  
Born of poor but honest parents, just the same  
as you or me.  
They never paid their bus-fares, though the notice  
on the box  
Said the tuppence should be dropped there. They were  
prone to aiming rocks  
At the old Arabian bobby, when his vast Arabian feet  
Woke the echoes in the evening down the long Arabian  
street.  
And they fought with vim at Chowder<sup>1</sup> when they  
got upon the spree—  
Chowder by the Shatt-el-Arab, in a bygone centuree.  
They were run in at Bagdad, as any cove might be;  
They got out on bail in Bagdad, mouldering by its  
rivers three;  
And when they couldn't pay the fine, they took it  
out instead—  
The usual term was seven days, and they "did it  
on their 'ead."  
At least, they meant to do it, but in these strange  
times the push<sup>2</sup>  
Wore flowing skirts, and when the cold north wind  
began to "whoosh"  
And their brown legs stood up in the air, a naked  
sight to see,  
They'd have all caught cold in Bagdad in that far-off  
centuree.

They played cricket in old Bagdad, where the Caliphs  
used to be,  
With eleven from Damascus; and they slew the referee;  
And though the wicket's vanished, and the ball is  
long since bust,  
And the pitch has long since crumbled, and the players  
all are dust,  
A ghostly echo lingers where the Forty used to roar,  
And on moonlight nights their ghostly forms make  
runs upon the shore.  
And scare the lingering jackal where the grandstand  
used to be,  
By the glassy Shatt-el-Arab in the seventh centuree.

They were mostly hanged in Bagdad; they were  
hanged upon a tree  
By the river Shatt-el-Arab, as might chance to you  
or me.  
It was at the Petty Sessions that they heard the  
sentence read,  
And this time, sad to say, they couldn't do it "on  
their 'ead."  
And there was peace in Bagdad when the Forty were  
no more,  
And the publican no longer heard them pounding on  
the door,  
When they had a thirst at midnight and were howling  
wild and free,  
And wanted beer in Bagdad—Bagdad down in Araby.

Now on the beach at Chowder bottles moulder silently,  
Chowder by the Shatt-el-Arab flowing swiftly to the  
sea.  
For the folk who used to heave them, they are  
numbered with the dead,  
And the ancient town of Bagdad is no longer painted  
red,

And no man chews another's ear within its dreary  
walls,  
And sandalled feet go softly by the traders' lonely  
stalls,  
Since the crowd that woke up Bagdad was scragged  
upon a tree  
In the city of the Caliphs in the seventh centuree.

(1) Chowder, a once famous picnic resort on Sydney Harbor, now degenerated into complete respectability.

(2) Push, Australian for an association of larrikins, otherwise hooligans.



# The Fool and His Inheritance.

Being a Complete and Authentic History of the  
World, in four Chapters.

## I.

**I**N the latter days a man named Smith was sitting in the water. The water was not deep, but it showed signs of rising. And the man Smith was sitting in it.

The exact year did not matter. It was a time when all record of dates, as peoples used to understand them, had been lost. In the world's early history there was no rain, but a steam went up and watered the face of the earth. The globe was alive and strenuous. There were old father Himalayas 275,000 feet in height, or even more—perhaps very much more. If a great mountain, or even a whole range, sank now and then, it mattered nothing; Nature woke next day, or next Sunday week, and threw up a new herd of Alps. The peaks towered almost above the atmosphere. Even the boulder that was shot upward by the most vigorous young volcano of all, often failed to reach their tops. Part of the planet was solid, but much was still just hot sludge. There were more continents than there are now, and far less sea surface. Atlantis was in existence and full of vigor. The Greek Archipelago and the East Indies, and the West Indies, and Polynesia and Micronesia were all land areas instead of mere pinnacles peering above the waste of waters to tell where great countries and great possibilities once were. Japan had not broken loose from China, or England and Ireland from France. The oceans had not burst

in and made the Baltic, or the Mediterranean, or the Gulf of Mexico, or the Inland Sea of Japan. The rivers had not had time to dig the vast channels and valleys they have since excavated; they slid over gigantic elevations and then threw themselves headlong down dizzy heights into the marine abyss. Because there was much more land then, and the land was higher, the sea was, naturally, deeper. In many places its depth exceeded 300 miles. The fact was the same then as it is now, that if the earth were flattened out there would be enough water to drown it all to the depth of a mile, but the land in those old, old days had not even begun to be flattened out; consequently the ocean was something like a funnel filled to the top. It had not begun to be like a cup, still less like a saucer, or a plate, or like a billiard table with a thin layer of moisture on top of it. It was the heroic age, when all the world was young—when ten-storey herbs scraped the sky and trees were things that armies might live in. Chaos was just settling down and beginning to keep house, and Earth was the vast, squalling, tempestuous baby of Mrs. Chaos. Life was starting, but it was starting on a big scale, and small-brained animals, the size of cathedrals, scuffled round clumsily in the basement of things among the coals and the debris. There was no definite time, and space was not considered, and as for weights and measures, anything weighed what it liked, and everything measured what it felt inclined. These were the Days of Big Things, yet they were only the pale reflection of the Days of Bigger Things which went before; and before them were the Biggest Things, and before them again was Mystery.

The Days of Slightly Smaller Things need only be glanced at. They were also long before man was devised, but in this period, which may have lasted for millions and millions of years, the globe began to take root. It no longer boiled with its old fervor and recklessness; the crust became firm, and when the

boiling ceased the wholesale manufacture of new mountains left off. This was, in a sense, a misfortune, yet it was plainly inevitable. It marked the beginning of the end, yet the beginning of the end had to be. Civilisation was impossible while a great part of the earth was liable to throw itself up 100,000 feet any morning before breakfast. More than that, even savagery was impossible. So was man and man's remotest perceptible ancestor. It was only when the Time of Hot Sludge had passed away that fixed, or even partly fixed, institutions became practicable. It was during the Day of Slightly Smaller Things that the hot mist ceased to water the earth and rain set in. Animal life no more consisted of vast, shapeless and accidental masses of wandering meat; it took definite form, it had legs, and a tail, and teeth, and was no longer just anyhow. It gave up the old methods by which it used to wrap itself around and engulf its prey, and instead it ate him. Beasts of the field left off the ancient processes by which they amalgamated, or broke in two and went their various ways, nor did a bit of one animal any longer join on to a bit of another, thus turning two of them into three. In fact, Identity became established. Each creature became Itself, and remained Itself, instead of being two-fifths of itself to-day and three-eighths of some other affair to-morrow. And for the first time animals began to have names. In those days were the dinosaurs and the pterodactyls, and the plesiosaurus and the ichthyosaurus, and the mammoth, and the mastodon, and the labyrinthodon that was a Sabbath day's journey around the waist, and the foxolophodon. And in the hither end of this period, the wondrous creature who was one day to rule the planet and all its contents, came down thoughtfully from his skyey bower, and put a tentative foot on the surface of his new kingdom. Mandril I., commonly known in his day and generation as Mandril Treetop, even as people spoke in later years of Henry Tudor or Philip Augustus, had attained, in a small sort of way,



to his crown. The crown may have sat uneasily on his sloping brow, and the kingdom may have been precarious, still the Monarch had arrived. After that, his march was ever onward, and in the end he trod the foxolophodon under foot, and gave the dust of the labyrinthodon to the four winds of the hollow firmament. Thus the Fool came into his Inheritance.

And already the Inheritance was fading. Even while Mandril Treetop, the first sovereign of all, sat hesitating on the lower branch of the old domain which he was about to abandon, and stirred up with his toe the dust of the new empire which he was about to assume—even before he cast away his tail and began to have diseases and improvements and sins—the glory was beginning to depart. The miserable weakness at the root of the scheme of things was that substances would not fall upwards. The structure was noble yet the base was rotten. Everything tended towards the bottom. The rain, the frost, the hail, the snow, the heat, the drought, and the winds, were always weathering down the giant hills, which the Fool who had got the Inheritance has described as eternal, but nothing ever weathered them up. The rills, and streams, and rivers, and torrents ground the rocks to powder, and carried the debris out into the sea. The restless, fretting waves, which are the teeth of Time the great rock-eater, devoured the bases of the cliffs, and bit by bit the cliffs also fell into the sea. The sea gathered them in its large, wet arms, and held them to its large, wet breast, and took them further out into its large, deep places, and buried them there. Then there were crumbling cliffs and perishing precipices in the sea itself. In countless places a shallow ocean suddenly became an ocean of depth almost incalculable. There was a submarine wall, perhaps many miles high, between the shallows and the great deeps, and this wall always tended to break away and drop. The downward tendency was the canker which ate at the root of all things. As fragments of the land and other

substances fell into the sea, the waters naturally rose. As they rose they attacked the land with renewed energy. And as each little section of the rampart of the planet fell away, the defence became weaker. When once the earth lost the habit of heaving skyward with stupendous inward convulsions, its fate was sealed. It became a beleagured city, with wide defences and immense supplies of provisions, but with no hope of relief; and the case of the city which is compelled to stand wholly on the defensive, and which has no possible chance of relief, is almost hopeless.

The period during which the Fool looked with unseeing eyes on the waste of his Inheritance, and did not even suspect that it was wasting, was a very long one. It lasted from the days when Mandril Treetop was king to the beginning of the nineteenth century. About this period the Fool began vaguely to realise that something sounded hollow beneath his feet. In a futile sort of fashion he commenced to take stock, yet, at the same time, he became mad with pride, and set to work to throw away his estate with both hands, and more furiously than ever.

As already mentioned, a man named Smith was sitting in the water. And the water was a little higher than it had been.

## II.

In the nineteenth century the position was discouraging. The Baltic, the Mediterranean, the Inland Sea of Japan, the Gulf of Mexico, the straits which divided England and Ireland from the Continent, and which separated Australia and New Zealand and Japan and Ceylon from Asia, all hinted at the persistent rising of the ocean. Atlantis had vanished and left no trace. The Greek Archipelago, the East and West Indies, the South Sea Isles, all told of great lands that had been, but were no more. As for the material which had been thrown into the sea to thus raise its level, its origin was obvious enough. Every-



where there were tablelands—the mere stumps of gigantic ranges which had weathered down and been washed into the basement of affairs. By the breadth of these tablelands it was possible to guess the altitude of the old mountains of which they been the root, and the figures were almost beyond belief. The process of denudation was still going on. Man took to measuring with scientific instruments the height of the Alps, and every time he measured an Alp it was some feet or inches shorter than it had been a few years before. And not only did the earth grow smaller, but what remained of it grew less valuable. As mountains were blotted out by the strenuous walking of the hoof of Time, the rainfall diminished, and fertility became more or less a back number. Gobi, Sahara, Arabia, Persia, and the dry inlands of Australia, all showed that the great asset was becoming depreciated, as well as becoming less.

That portion of the earth which remained above water was obviously cooling. This was not a very important feature in the case, still it was a feature. Where the old Norse adventurers built towns and churches, and appointed Bishops in old Greenland, a thousand years earlier, there was now only desolation. The area thus lost there and elsewhere was neither of great extent nor of great price, still the loss showed that the luck was steadily against the Fool who had the great Inheritance.

The nineteenth century was a sort of turning point in the world's history. During that century the world cut away from the old habits and the old traditions, and threw the old order of things overboard, and started afresh. It invented the census, and began to take stock of its population. It devised the idea that unless the human race increased, all the time—unless the people always continued to grow more numerous on a shrinking estate—something dreadful would happen. It began to be troubled about the Birth-rate, an idea which never occurred to its remote progenitor,



Mandril Treetop, even in his wildest dreams when the earth was hard below his head and the undigested cocoanut lay heavy on his hairy chest. In great haste there were invented drains, sanitation, hygiene, improved medical science, and all manner of new departures. And truly the inventors had their reward. It was a vast reward—how vast no one appeared to realise at the moment. The single little kingdom of England and Wales possessed 8,000,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century—8,000,000 people as the accumulation of countless aeons of history, and of all the time that was previous to history. It had begun the accumulation before Baby Genesis appeared in his cradle on the dim horizon of Time, and up to the later days of George III. this was the entire result. But when the nineteenth century ended, the same little kingdom had a population of 32,000,000, and it was still lamenting about its birthrate, and wondering why the increase was not greater. In 100 years it multiplied its people by four, a result which had previously been the slow and difficult achievement of eight centuries. In 100 years it added to itself three times as many people as it had previously done in all the innumerable caravan of the ages. About 1901 learned statisticians figured things out carefully on pieces of paper, and put their heads together, and made remarks like these:—

(1) England and Wales have now 32,000,000 people.

(2) If the population had increased ever since the days of Edward the Confessor, at the rate of the past century, the population of this little State would now be more than 520,000,000,000 (five hundred and twenty thousand millions) instead of 32,000,000.

(3) If the birth-rate and death-rate remain as at present, the population in another four centuries will be over 8,000,000,000 (eight thousand millions).

But then the learned statisticians shook their erudite craniums thoughtfully at each other, and

separated with profound misgivings, carrying their pieces of paper in their pockets or their hats.

Yet the birth-rate of England was not unusual, nor was its rate of increase by any means abnormal. In fact, it was the grief of many patriotic Britons that the growth of the English population was less than that of the populations of Germany and Russia, and the fall of the Empire was gravely prognosticated unless the amazing multiplication of inhabitants could be further boosted along. In the nineteenth century all Europe had a birth-rate mania, and soon there began to appear the inevitable signs that the work was being overdone. In the year 1800, there was no State in the world so crowded that it could not grow enough food for its own consumption. A hundred or a hundred and ten years later, there was hardly one State in Europe which did not depend largely on imported food, and the countries from which the food was imported, such as Siberia, the United States, Canada, and Argentina, were themselves filling so rapidly that it became plain they would soon require all their foodstuffs for their own consumption. It was an unprecedented situation. Except in a very temporary way, and in strictly isolated cases, the world had never seen such a position of affairs before, and when it had seen it, the trouble arose solely through misgovernment—never from overcrowding pure and simple. The trouble, in fact, was so new that it was hardly recognised. The congested lands rather prided themselves on having to forage abroad for a loaf which grew every day more precarious, and in the wild inflation of their vanity they called the operation "Commerce."

There were, of course, undeveloped countries, mostly in Asia and Africa, from which supplies of food might reasonably be looked for later on. Their populations were thin, and had been so ever since a date so very far back that the eye of man could not see behind it. By tribal wars, misgovernment, homicide, infanticide, slavery, lack of sanitation, lack of



medical science, and by other devices the colored races were busy keeping down their own numbers and relieving the strain on an overloaded sphere. They were quite willing to continue doing this, but, as it befell, the age of philanthropy and missionary enterprise happened along. The white man reached a stage of development at which he Couldn't Keep Still. He resolved to wash and drain and uplift his brown brother, and his yellow brother, and his piebald brother, and his striped sister, and the blotted baby who was the offspring of the union of the two last named. In this enterprise he set to work with a will, and the results exceeded his most sanguine expectations.

Java, a comparatively small isle, had built up a population of something like 4,000,000 folk as the result of thousands, or millions, of years of endeavor. This was in the year 1801. In 1901, a proud and satisfied Dutch officialdom looked out on a native population of about 33,000,000, and Holland laid its benevolent hand on its own waistcoat and said to itself that it had done well. The French toiled at the same sort of undertaking in Algeria and Sahara, and the British in India and Africa. When the Kaffirs began to be so numerous that the time seemed close at hand when they would tread their white masters and benefactors under foot, the Briton said he had not lived in vain. He said the same thing again, and with still more emphasis, when he found a remedy for the disastrous sleeping sickness, and calculated that the niggers thus saved would accumulate at compound interest, until, in a comparative handful of years, there would be 100,000,000 extra niggers, and after that the increase would go on indefinitely. Periodically Nature tried to thin out the super-abundant peoples in the old, old way, and periodically the interfering animal called Man dragged her backwards off her prey by the tail, and checked her beneficent purpose. He preserved the blind and the deaf, and the idiotic, and he laboriously



patched the lame and docked the cripple for repairs. Nothing was too large or too small for him in the frenzy of his interference.

The so-called nineteenth century was, after all, a mere fleck of foam on the surface of the ocean. It looked a very long century to those who lived in it, but when it was past, it looked just as short as any other century, and just as unimportant. It died, and joined the innumerable procession of the ghosts. It receded till at last a veil dropped behind it, and it went out of sight. Most men ceased to remember there was ever a nineteenth century. If they had been told of it, they would have presumed vaguely that it was so-called because it was 1900 years after something or another, but what it was 1900 years after was generally forgotten. The 100-year period, as a measure of time, became obsolete, and new methods arose. Yet even in a chronicle of imperceptible decay, wherein very few dates stand out conspicuously, this one calls for attention. Students of the preface to the Book of Life always kept an eye on it, as representing a time when the Fool deliberately seated himself on the end of the topmost branch of his Inheritance, and then commenced to saw off the limb. In that brief span he used up more of his irreplaceable assets in the shape of coal, iron, lead, gold and silver, than he had done in all the world's previous history. He accumulated about twice as many people for the lean earth to feed as had accumulated during all the world's previous history. He ate up far more of his forest timber wealth than his predecessors had done in all the world's previous history, and the forests which had survived the stress of a thousand myriads of years vanished almost in a night. Truly, Mandril Treetop, the first king, burnt his boats when he came down from his airy bower and put his hairy, hesitating foot upon the earth. There was no going back for his descendants. The airy bower had gone to the sawmill.

## III.

The ages drifted past like ghosts, and man still toiled hard at filling up the sea. He became a slave to the habit of travel, and built ships innumerable, and when they sank it was so much more of the produce of the earth drowned on the floor of the great waters. Airships broke down and fell into the ocean; naval battles were fought, and the debris of fleets went to the bottom. People were buried at sea, suicides buried themselves there; ashes, banana skins, and the ruins of breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner were thrown overboard. The same thing happened to crockery and cigar ends. Hats, newspapers, and deck chairs blew off ships. Irrigation channels and drains carried more waste into the universal receptacle. Then mud-punts were devised which opened at the root, and the mud dredged out of harbors was carried out and dropped promiscuously. Every time any one of these things was done the great wet waste heaved itself upwards a trifle higher against the diminishing fortress of the land. There the barriers crumbled steadily. The tooth of the strange thing called Progress ate them night and day. Wherever a sturdy mountain still defied the elements, engineers bored railway tunnels, and water channels, and drainage channels through it, and hacked roads out of its sides, and blew out enormous areas of it with dynamite to make room for hotels and villas; also they tore it to pieces for stone to make roads which only led from one Fool to another. In every way the levelling down process was encouraged. And as the sea rose and the earth flattened out and diminished, and the rain grew less, and population multiplied till there was no place in all the treeless planet where one man could be out of sight of another, the pressure on the last possible ounce of food became terrible.

Then, just as it had been almost decided to abolish the disease described as Civilisation, and to cut the absurdly vast human race down to something like the



level of its resources, someone discovered the art of making rain, and the problem was postponed for another 10,000 years.

Rain-making turned the deserts into gardens again, and once more food was fairly plentiful. The deserts were, in the main, low-lying regions, where all vestige of hill or mountain had disappeared. There moisture had handed in its resignation. Yet, though they might have been only a few feet above sea level, the deserts were barriers of a kind against the final sinkage of the Fool's Inheritance. There were no rivers or streams flowing through them. They were not being washed down into the sea. Regarded as ramparts they were perfect and permanent. But when man made rain, he made new rivers in these dry places, and their body and bones fled seaward once more, and still another defence began to crumble. Of course, the relief was only temporary. With the perpetual growth of population, arising out of an insane faith in the big birth-rate, the time came when humanity was again up against the last possible ounce of food. Standing on a level and shrunken isle, which reared itself only a few inches above the water, the rulers realised that the folly of rain-making must cease lest the last foothold should be melted away, and that the race must be reduced to more reasonable dimensions. The beleagured city had to get rid of its superfluous garrison. Jonah had to be thrown overboard by his shipmates. It only remained to decide who was Jonah and who was the shipmate. Plainly, in such a case, he who acted last would be Jonah and he who acted first would not.

It was long after food had become, in the main, a Government monopoly, and the whole human family was on rations, that the men at the head of certain nations met together. They represented the three most progressive States—in other words, the three which had made the most tunnels, drains, and irrigation channels, thrown the most ashes and lunch debris overboard from ships, dropped most sludge out of punts,



and washed away most of the barrier which stood between humanity and its ultimate fate. It was decided that the League of the Most Desirable Nations should take up arms, and resume the almost forgotten art of war, and wipe out the Less Desirable Nations in order to make room. The Most Desirable Nations were primarily those who spoke first. In a secondary sense they were the strongest and most courageous. Culture ceased for the moment to count, for the object was slaughter, pure and simple. The League was to consist of the smallest number of people who seemed, by their energy and physique, to have a fair chance of killing the rest of the people, and if a clan 500,000,000 strong looked equal to killing 800,000,000 of another clan, it would have been plain madness to take the 800,000,000 sept into the combine instead of the 500,000,000 one. The result of the war would not have been any more certain, and when the struggle was over there might have been an extra 300,000,000 mouths to feed.

The preparations for the great campaign upset the economic balance. The struggle for food had become so intense that if man took his eye for a single day off even such a trifle as an onion growing in a flower-pot, scarcity was liable to set in. People got up in the dead waste and centre of the night upon a suspicion that a fly was sitting on a single vegetable. When huge armies began to gather—armies that must be fed, and which had ceased for the moment to be productive of food—famine struck the globe like a hurricane. Half the human race died of want, and the war—a war that was without pity and without mercy—extinguished more than two-thirds of the remainder. Man had elbow room again. He was able to limit the use of rain-making. In his exuberance he even began to plant a tree here and there, and pot plants, which had long been a penal offence, because the pots and the earth were wanted for the growth of vegetables, made a tentative reappearance on the window sills of the wealthy. This new phase of life did not last long, for

the earth kept dropping into its watery grave, but while it lasted it was an oasis in the latter days of the world's history—the days of brown misery and utter boredom, and complete loss of hope.

The Less Desirable Nations, of course, did not surrender without an effort. No one really desired that they should, for every man killed made one less mouth to feed, and one less father, or potential father, of a family that had to be fed. But the Less Desirables went down at last, and with them went nearly all that remained of painting, sculpture, literature, poetry and music. They were a feckless people, these hangers-on to the threadbare tail of Art, and the bridge-builders and ship-constructors, and tunnel-makers, and blasters of great mountains, were too much for them. Thereafter Art practically ceased, and literature became a dry, small-beer chronicle of current events and figures about rainfall and river gaugings. It was a world in which few current events happened. There were no longer any new countries to explore. There were no longer any strange savages to make history. There were no animals save cows, and no birds. There was no more burglary, for so many people lived in each house that it was impossible for a thief to enter and leave unseen, and in the crowded state of the planet there was no quiet place to which he could remove the plunder. Murder left off for want of a secluded spot in which to deposit the body, besides homicide and assault are not crimes to be done with a host of people looking on. Even forgery was rare, for everybody had somebody looking over his shoulder, and the peace and holy calm which are necessary to the effective copying of a stolen signature were very scarce. And politics consisted mainly in the struggle to keep the sinking ship called Earth afloat a little longer. All hands were at the pumps, and when poesy and fancy, music, song, and the cult of the Beautiful died with the extirpation of the Less Desirable Nations, there was nothing left save the clang and roar of such pumping.



The dreary, scrappy, materialistic literature which remained was almost all about pumping.

Yet, when the flag of the Less Desirable Peoples went down in a welter of blood—when their sun set behind a graveyard in which were a billion corpses, and the people who clung to the last fragments of Art fell before the materialistic folk who blasted the hills away with dynamite—the final man among the vanquished had still a semblance of consolation. The Byzantines were the first to be wiped out. They were crushed between the upper and the nether millstones, and before the beginning of the stupendous battle which was to decide which half of the human race should be thrown overboard to lighten the ship, one faithless, worthless race had been so utterly blotted away that not even an infant survived. When the representatives of the self-styled Most Desirable Nations met to compile the list of the peoples who were to be the slayers and the peoples who were to be the slain, the Byzantines were a bewildering problem. They were more sturdy and promised to be better fighters than any of those on the list of the irrevocably doomed. They promised to be worse fighters than the communities which were placed without hesitation on the list of the saved and the executioners. It was a question whether, with the Byzantines fighting in the army of the Lost, the destroyers could feel strong enough to be certain that the Lost Races would be lost. On the other hand, if they were asked to join those who were to remain on deck while the rest were thrown overboard, it was a question whether the craft would not still be overloaded. The position was one of difficulty.

The Byzantines settled the matter themselves. After their old, shifty fashion, they negotiated with both parties. In a frenzy of terror, their Government implored that the nation should be included among those who were to be the slayers, and offered to be the most active and energetic of butchers, and, at the same time, it negotiated with the doomed, and promised to



be the strongest prop of the defence. And again, it urged its case with the League of the Most Desirable Nations with unmanly assurances that it only proposed to join the rival forces in order to betray them. In the end, two countless hosts trod the Byzantine peoples under foot, and fought out their own quarrel on top of the innumerable Byzantine dead. The ruined community found that its over-subtle diplomacy had only resulted in leaving it to do single-handed battle against the rest of the human race. It died more nobly than it had lived, and the defence it put up against a thousand-fold odds was worth remembering.

The myriads of the dead were carried inland for burial in order that their bones might somewhat elevate that surface which had become the one subject of conversation. And then, Man having thrown overboard as much as possible of his cargo, the weary, old ark sagged along on its voyage.

THE MAN NAMED SMITH WAS STILL SITTING IN THE WATER.

#### IV.

At the time of the Great Slaying, the end was still thousands of years away, but the inevitableness of it was fully recognised. Very, very grey and same was this old age of the Earth. Poetry never revived after the Slaying, for there were no longer mountains or waterfalls to supply inspiration. In the general levelling down, the lakes had slopped away drearily into the sea. There were still rivers and streams, but they crawled lazily on flattened beds and between flattened shores bolstered up with artificial embankments, and the old rush and ripple, and the old music in little sharps and trebles, were never heard any more. The once tree-lined banks were bare, and the hidden beauty spots, where youths and maidens had played at love-making, were all uncovered. It was not a world to inspire poetry. Prose also became almost extinct. It

had ceased to seem worth while. There remained love as a subject for the romancist and the song-writer, but love was not the same thing as of old. Man was still busy lightening the crippled, dismasted planet, which grew obviously less seaworthy every year, and his great object was to maintain a steady surplus of deaths over births. Permission to marry was hard to get, and permission to bear children still harder. Lovers did not wander by the shore on moon-lit nights as of old, for the shore had become an illimitable line where land an inch high melted imperceptibly into water an inch deep. Surf-bathing became an extinct amusement for lack of surf nearer than five miles out. Picnics ceased for lack of picnic resorts. There was no more mountain climbing, for all the Alps were deader than the bones of the last Zoo. Travelling for pleasure went out of fashion, because it became a mere journeying from one plain to another. Sea commerce became less and less, till it almost died away, partly because many of the greatest commercial countries had become partially submerged sandbanks, and partly because the sea grew less commodious as it became wider, so that navigation degenerated into a poling of flat-bottomed vessels over perpetual shallows. The drama survived, but when all the world was much the same, and all the scenery was practically the same scenery—when the brigand's stronghold, the robber's cave, the precipice and the crag, the river and the waterfall, the old baronial castle on the hill, and other properties of the kind were cut out, it became a curiously monotonous affair. Even the old, crude emotions were lacking, for a time came when people were Born Old. For thousands of years before the end, the knowledge that the planet was under sentence of death made Man a subdued, whispering, soft-footed being—one who stepped lightly as if there was a dead body in the house, and went circumspectly on his way. He became the ideal undertaker, or draper, or house agent.



He was flat-footed, like all plain-dwellers, and his sight was curiously long, by reason of the vast distances which lay before him.

It was in those days that people began to go mad while on long mono-rail journeys, and to throw their luggage out of the carriage window. They went mad with the terror of realising, as the leagues went by, that all the earth was really and truly only a fraction above sea-level anywhere, and they threw their goods out of the carriage window in the hope of elevating, by at least an inch or two, the surface where the things fell. It was a curious development, yet a wholly natural one. As a matter of fact, a huge proportion of the population was mad in the latter days, and a wonderful number of the madmen had schemes about the emigration of the balance of humanity to some other planet. The old faiths were wholly lost. In their hearts the people had always had ideas of re-incarnation upon this earth. They talked of heaven, but what they really believed was that the green globe they knew so well was good enough for them. And now the globe was going down under their feet, and they felt with a huge fear that their ghosts would soon be homeless among the stars, and a great, blank, white terror came upon them. There was a brief interlude of wild drunkenness, and during this period (it lasted a century or two) it seemed as if humanity would go suddenly to its grave with a bottle in one hand and a pint of horrors in the other. But this phase passed, and instead of a sudden descent to the tomb, the old, slow sinkage was resumed.

The deserts were carefully preserved, and the rainless regions were cherished. They, at least, were places with some sort of durability about them. They might seem useless, yet they were the raft to which Man was to betake himself as a final refuge. As a



matter of fact, he never did retreat there, but that was a mere incident. He was resolved, at all events, that the raft should not be needlessly overloaded. The population of the world—the world which had once been as densely packed with humanity as an anti-hill, was got down below a million, but by this time only half a million square miles remained above sea-level. It was resolved to reduce humanity by strict limitation of marriages and births to half a million, and when that point was reached the authorities were to reconsider the situation with a possible view to further reduction. All that remained of the globe had, of course, been long under one Government. Racial differences were no longer worth preserving, when all races were going the same road.

Probably with a more efficient crew the old vessel called Earth might have kept on the surface of events for many centuries longer. But the crew was shockingly disheartened and unfit in the days when men went mad and threw their luggage out of the window. So when the sinkage happened quietly one morning there was no real cause for surprise. The inefficiency of the precautions taken in the last days was pathetic, yet it is difficult to see what more could have been done. A rampart, some two or three feet high, was built around the last remnant of the Fool's Inheritance. There were objections to digging material out of the earth for the purpose, because the hollows thus created became swamps and water holes, and the process was merely a letting of the enemy into the citadel under pretence of keeping him out. So the flimsy dyke was constructed of sea sand and seaweed, of butter boxes and coffins and fish, of the wrecks of old houses, and a meteorite or two, and the remains of broken-up ships. Also the last war vessel was torn to pieces and thrown into the heap, along with the old libraries, the contents

of the old museums, and everything else which was not included among the bare necessities of life. Naked and bankrupt, except for the merest food and clothes and shelter, the Fool and his wife made their last stand behind their last rampart.

For a great length of time—in fact ever since the beginning of real history—there had been a suspicion that the incredible weight of the ice accumulations at the Poles was making the sphere top-heavy, and that it might one day lose its balance and do a swing half round, and revolve on a new axis. Then, with the Polar overburden dissolved, it would go back with another swing to its old course. And one morning the event happened, or partly happened.

It was a morning just like any other morning. Nothing indicated that the Last Day had arrived, and that a tired old member of the universe was prepared for its long rest. Men were marrying in moderation, and giving in marriage so far as the law allowed. Children were being born, though not many of them. Folk were eating and drinking and sleeping, and if they were not making merry it was because the habit had left them when they lost their souls at the Great Slaying. And then the planet did a dizzy roll, and the sun, and the stars, and the great constellations fled across the sky like demented things. It stopped. Then it rolled back, and the sun and the stars, and the great constellations fled back like demented things to their old positions, and a great wind blew in the halls of heaven. As a matter of fact, the catastrophe had been far less than it might have been. The venerable ball had only partially capsized, and had righted itself. It was again riding the firmament on an even keel. But the shock tore the sea from its bed, and it poured upon the defenceless land, and the utterly enfeebled rampart dissolved like a fly struck by the car of Juggernaut. And Man went—just went.

Smith sat in the water. He was the last man—one purely accidental survival. He sat in the water because there was no place else to sit, for the world was now all water. Where he sat the shoreless sea was only a few inches deep; but the remnant of the base of things was fast dissolving under him. The last ruins of the last works of Man were falling down. And Smith was mad—raving mad. The Last Man would hardly be otherwise. So he made a seaweed garland and put it round his hat, and then, with a loud howl, he waded into the deeper places and perished.



## The Baseless Fabric of the City of Free Drinks.

IT was the Thinnest Man in the Club who rose in sudden protest against the remarks of the Politician. The Politician had been denouncing compulsory military service, and was temporarily out of breath.

"Voluntary armies are no good," said the Thinnest Man decisively. "All my military service was with a voluntary force, and the army that opposed us was voluntary also. Two more incapable gangs never got together. Speaking as a soldier——"

The Man of Greatest Circumference howled with derision, and the Slow Man, after a moment spent in thought, decided on his line of action, and howled likewise.

"What's the joke?" asked the Man of Greatest Circumference. "I never knew that you were in the army. When was it, and where, and how?"

"I was a general in those days," replied the Thinnest Man with profound seriousness. "At least, I was a kind of general. I was a full private in the evening—at least, not quite full, yet I had had one drink—but my promotion was rapid. Napoleon wasn't a circumstance to me. Just about three hours after the superannuated policeman rang the dinner bell——"

"But what in the name of thunder did the policeman, whether he was superannuated or not, ring the dinner bell for?" asked the Tallest Man.

"He rang it as a sign that the campaign was about to start," said the Thinnest Man impatiently.

"I wish you would let me finish. As I was trying to explain, I rose to be a general in the course of the night, and about five in the morning, just before I and the demented sewing-machine canvasser ran out of the town, I became vice-president of the Republic."

"What Republic?" demanded the Politician.

"Mexico—a fine large republic, I can tell you. It was at the City of Free Drinks——"

"City of what?"

"Well, it was hardly a city. It was the Town of Free Drinks."

"And—and—and—well, what pay did you get for all these extraordinary services?"

"There was no pay at all. The campaign didn't last long enough. I lost some luggage, too, and spent about a hundred dollars making the army drunk. But there was a kind of set off. I didn't pay my hotel bill, and I got away with the entire artillery——"

"Single-handed?"

"Yes. It consisted of an old revolver lent by the hotelkeeper. I ran away with it in a moment of absence of mind, so to speak. And then the President escaped with the tablecloth."

"But you spoke of an insane sewing-machine canvasser. What made him insane?"

"Oh, I think he was always that way. He wasn't quite mad, you know, only a sort of monomaniac. Very interesting person."

"And what about the battle?" broke in the Man with the Best Top Hat.

"The battle! I never said there was any battle. Still, there would have been, only for the dog——"

The Man who Belonged to the Legal Profession butted in, and tried to evolve some kind of order out of chaos.

"This is the first appearance of a dog in this somewhat confused narrative," he said. "Which army did the animal command, or what was his official

position? Was he a civil or military dog, for instance?"

"He wasn't civil, and he wasn't military," shouted the Thinnest Man impatiently.

"Clerical dog, I suppose then—another instance of the interfering and overbearing character of a church which has outlived its usefulness——"

"Now, who in all Christendom ever heard of a clerical dog? He was just dog, I tell you."

"Well, what breed was he, and why did he interfere, and what is it all about?" demanded the Bald Headed Man, clutching the air with both hands.

The Thinnest Man wore the aspect of one who, having been interrupted too often in the relation of a plain, unvarnished tale, prays for patience and sanity.

"The dog, if you must interrupt, was any old kind of a dog. He interfered for the same reason that any old kind of a dog would—because the hostile forces were standing on his master's vegetables. I didn't see him, but I heard him in the distance—him or some other dog. It might be any dog. I don't profess to know the sound of one dog from another when I had never met the dog and didn't even know he was there. It was just before the army fell down——"

"Why," clamoured the Man with the Presentation Gold Watch, thus taking the words out of the mouth of the Man with the Principal Feet—"why did the army fall down? It wasn't shot, was it?"

"Shot? No! It only let go its hold, and it fell down as any army might, and went to sleep."

"Look here," said the Man of Greatest Circumference, "I think this story ought to be started from the beginning. Either commence with some information about the City of Free Drinks, or else tell us who the demented sewing-machine canvasser



was. And then progress steadily till we reach the dog.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“The name of the canvasser was Ramon Castillo or Bloggs, or something like that,” said the Thinnest Man when the atmosphere had cleared a little. “No; on second thoughts, it couldn’t have been Bloggs, could it? No Mexican is ever named Bloggs. On the other hand, almost every Mexican is named Ramon Castillo, unless he happens to be a woman. The City of Free Drinks used to be at Juarez, or El Paso del Norte, and El Paso is a sort of dog-kennel or coal-scuttle or something, built of mud or adobe or whatever they call the stuff. It lies alongside the Great River, which never amounts to much, though sometimes—most times, in fact—it amounts to less than it does at other times. I don’t want to unduly disparage anybody’s river, but these are the facts.

“You see, there is an American town on one side of the river, and a Mexican town on the other. And there is a bridge between them. One town was partly asleep when I knew it, and the other town was dead. At one time there was some mystery about exchange—I think that’s what they call the thing—so that on the Mexican side you could have a ten-cent. drink and put down a Mexican dollar and get an American dollar in change. Then you could go back to the American side, and put down a United States dollar, and get a ten-cent. drink and a Mexican dollar. It was only the long tramp between the two towns and the dreadful quality of the liquor that prevented the inhabitants drinking all the time. Anyhow, the game didn’t last long. The free drinks were off when I went there, though the legend remained.

“I was young then, and was spending some of my father’s money in travelling. At New Orleans I foregathered with two young fellows named Clay, and we went West together till one summer morning—it was a Saturday—we struck the City of Free Drinks.

We looked at it for half an hour, and got tired. The houses were mostly one storey high, and they were all drab. The girls were untidy and black-haired. The streets were dust, and the public houses were very many. And there were two policemen of a sort. One was an old wreck who hid in a cellar when the trouble came along. And the other, Policeman Vega—we got to know him later—was a sour old clown, and he wore a hat like half a melon with hen's clothes on it. We drank some of the local liquor, and it made us so full of energy that we asked Policeman Vega when his grandmother gave up living in the family tree-top. We offered to buy him a cocoa-nut, too, and asked if his tail had been worn off with much sitting down. He was so angry that he gnashed both his teeth at us, so we left off, and had lunch at the hotel. Then we sat down to a card game."

"And you were swindled?" suggested the Man of the Greatest Circumference.

"Not exactly. It was a three-handed game. The winner got nothing, but the two losers had each to buy a Mexican drink at his own expense, and either drink it or give it to the poor. The man who won the rubber had a free cigar, and threw it out of the widow. So the afternoon dragged on somehow, and we decided to clear out of the half-breed republic as soon as the sun went down and the weather cooled. It was getting on our nerves. There were priests, and dust, and dogs, and mud walls, and mud churches, and sleepy men, and untidy girls to be seen, but there seemed to be nothing really alive. At least, there was nothing for a while. Then the City of Free Drinks appeared to wake up. It almost ran. Two men hurried by. A dog went off at a tangent. Two pieces of brown paper blew past, and for two pieces of brown paper to blow past at once was something out of the common. A pretty girl of about sixteen let down her hair in the courtyard, and waved her arms, and shouted something at somebody outside. Then the landlord



put a troubled head into our room and said that great disturbances were expected. We asked him what they were, but before he could explain Policeman Vega rang the dinner bell like mad outside, and announced that the republic was menaced, that free institutions were in danger, and that the marriage tie was liable to be broken at any moment. It sounded just like the Conservative party at election time. He said, too, that the sanctity of the domestic hearth had been ruthlessly invaded, or was liable to be at any moment. While he was performing, the girl of sixteen who had let down her hair and said things in the courtyard, came running back chased by two other girls, who were also in an untidy state. They pointed at her and jeered, and she threw dust at them. Then the constable resumed the broken thread of his discourse, and said that all well-affected citizens were to run their hardest to the Dog-tax Office or some place of the sort, and register their names with the Inspector of Nuisances—at least I think it was the Inspector of Nuisances, though it might be the Water-rate Collector. Arms were to be served out to them, and they were expected to defend the town to the last. While he was speaking the same girl appeared again. She was chased by four girls this time. They pressed her so hard that she fled into the hotel and threw a jug at her enemies through the window. We offered to protect her, and Policeman Vega ordered her assailants to disperse in the name of the Republic, one and indivisible—the sort of thing that Robespierre used to say in France in the month of Brumaire in the year One. Then he rang the dinner bell again, and announced that the serried hosts of Jobson were advancing.”

“Jobson?” queried the Man who was Generally Asleep.

“Well, Ramon Castillo, if you must worry about the finer details. But the name is too big. It’s easier to call him Jobson.”

“But,” said the Politician, “you called him



Bloggs just now. It would be much more tidy and satisfactory if you were to select a name and stick to it."

"I'll call him Bloggs if I like," said the Thinnest Man irritably, "and I'll call him Jobson if it suits me. You never met him, anyhow, and you couldn't tell him from a crow."

"Never mind these unreasonable interruptions," said the Man in the Background. "Go right on. Why were the countless hosts of Simpson advancing?"

"Well, as I said, Castillo was a sort of madman who traded in sewing-machines. He dealt in a machine called the Huckleberry, and his beat was among some of the small towns on the north side of the river. I believe he was afraid to return to his own country by himself because of his mother-in-law. It might have been his aunt or his grandmother. On Sundays, when he wasn't selling sewing-machines, he used to preach the Gospel of Liberty to the exiles. I believe his sewing-machine was a lockstitch affair, and he only charged two dollars deposit—or perhaps it was three. These Dagoes are very unreliable. Anyhow, his lectures were free. The exiles liked him. They were a harmless, jovial, hard-working lot. A few of them were criminals who had bolted out of Mexico with some decrepit policeman like Vega's mate after them—he had whiskers half a yard long and was defunct in both feet. Some had got drunk and broken more windows than they could pay for. Some had got engaged to two girls at once, and were lying low till one of the girls married somebody else. The rest had come across the border in search of better wages. They found Briggs——"

"Who was Briggs, and where did they find him?" asked the Man with the Principal Feet.

"Oh, hang it!" said the Thinnest Man in the Club, "I only call him Briggs because it's an easier name than Castillo. They found him a sort of combined joke and picture show. His impassioned appeals to

them to raise and throw off the yoke, and make him President of Mexico, and inaugurate the blessed reign of liberty, cheered them up immensely. Some of them swore eternal fealty to him, and some of them barked like dogs on the fringe of the meeting. I have heard it said that the best imitation of a cat-fight that has been done since the fall of the Roman Empire happened at one of his gatherings, but that is the sort of thing that it is impossible to swear to. And there were fellows who used to make noises like a bad debt in the distance just when he had got to the most frenzied section of his discourse, and break him up. Men who sell sewing-machines on time payment are very sensitive about bad debts. Still Brown persevered, and when his converts seemed numerous enough he began to organize the army of invasion, and he hired a man in the slop clothes line to make the banner that was to wave in the van. There was a design on it that looked like a fight between a devil and a rainbow with a gridiron fleeing in the distance, and it was the same colour as an attack of measles. Yes, it was a holy terror of a banner.

“ I suppose it was mean and low down the way some of the younger of the exiles pulled their chief’s leg, but, after all, somebody’s leg is always being pulled. Why, the first Conservative had his leg pulled in Chaos. He thought Chaos was going to last, and it didn’t. These fellows enrolled themselves and agreed to follow Jenkins to the last. They insisted, however, that the insurrection must start on a Saturday afternoon, and that the town of Juarez must be surprised to begin with. Their intentions were quite harmless. They intended to drive Policeman Vega’s hat down firmly on his head, and leave him helpless inside it. After that they were going to have a dance, and kiss the nicest looking girls, and tell the publicans to charge up the drinks to the revolution. And by the time they were tired and Vega had emerged from the wreckage of his hat, they would tell their



commander that the insurrection was finished, and get back across the river, and be ready to resume work on Monday morning. If they had taken the town by surprise it might have been a very pleasant evening.

“ But the news leaked out early. It leaked so badly that even the children knew about it. The girl we saw chased into the courtyard was a local beauty who had been round explaining to the other girls that they were coarse and ugly, and would never be asked to dance while she was around. Girls, when you come to think of it, are very frank with each other. It is my opinion that a girl is the frankest animal going, except a cat. The news of Thompson's revolt shook Juarez to its foundations. The Mayor and corporation, whose name was probably Ferdinand Garcia de Corunna, wired to adjacent towns for aid, but found there was no chance of military support till next day. In fact adjacent towns refused to take him seriously. So he locked his office, which had only one room, and went about 1250 feet out into the country till things should blow over. This defection left Vega, the policeman, at the head of affairs, and his sensible idea was to let the revolution come along when it felt inclined, and go away when it got tired. He was an elderly man, and a wise one in his way. He had seen revolutions before, and he knew that they all got tired and went away. But the Liquor Interest was against him. The publicans had seen revolutions, too, especially the very old publican at the corner, and the grandfather of the lame publican opposite, and they knew that an insurgent army never paid for its drinks, and that the Government forces which came to quell the uprising only gave I.O.U.'s. The old grandfather publican had bad debts of that kind on his books that dated back to Santa Anna's period, and Santa Anna died about the time I was born. The Liquor Interest demanded that Juarez should be defended, and it swept Policeman Vega off his feet. No policeman can afford to quarrel with all the



publicans in his little town. He would either have to pay for his refreshments for the rest of his days or else go around with his tongue hanging out and be an object of derision even to the children, or he would be driven to disgrace his profession by drinking at the town pump. There is no sadder sight on earth than a dry policeman. I have seen two in my life, and I never want to see a third. That was why Vega, against his better judgment, rang the dinner bell. If he had known that I was going to take the command of the town out of his hands I don't think he would have done it even for twice as many publicans as there were, but policemen are seldom prophets. If you read all the prophetic books of the Bible right through you will be surprised to find that not one of them was written by a Hebrew constable.

"The two Clays and I had no direct interest in the affair, but we were tired of cards, and this looked like a new gamble. It was proposed and seconded and carried that we should take a leading part in the defence of our adopted country. We had only adopted it two or three hours before, but that didn't matter. Our blood was up. We decided to run our hardest to the Dog Tax Office and there take up arms, and the fellows who were second and third in the race were to consume a Mexican cigar apiece at their own expense. I arrived first, which was good for me. I don't care much for Dago cigars, though Dago drinks are worse. The old style of Mexican liquor, for instance, if poured on a jibbing horse, would make it go, and a cloud of smoke would rise from the animal, but it wasn't the best fluid you could take inwardly. I have heard that there was once a mutiny in the Mexican Navy over it; the men refused to resume duty unless their grog was stopped. Of course that was a long while ago, and things gradually improved. There was a time when people had to be dragged into the hotels by the police."

Some person, who was not clearly identified, here

made certain remarks about the evils of excess. Nobody paid much attention to him.

“As I was saying, we got to the Dog Tax Office, and tendered our services. So far, there were only three volunteers besides ourselves. I was disappointed at this. I wanted to witness the spontaneous upheaval of a free and generous people, and this Saturday evening it didn't seem to heave worth mentioning. The serving out of weapons was a failure, too. I had my choice between an old sabre and a thick stick. The armament was so unsatisfactory that I went back to the hotel and borrowed the landlord's ancient revolver. The Clays stopped there to finish the two native cigars they had lost on the race to the Dog Tax Office. The rest of us (five, including Policeman Vega) marched to the outskirts of the town, and took up an impregnable position outside a drinking saloon. There I asked the army if it had a mouth on it, and told it to name its liquor. Vega got angry over this harmless incident. He was a sour and unmanageable man, and he said the troops must not drink while on duty. The troops laughed the metallic laugh, and mentioned their liquors. They told Vega he had no more chance than a lame devil at the back of perdition. The old policeman not only refused to have anything himself, but he smote one man's drink with the flat of his sabre, and sent it flying into the middle of the Republic. After that it was all wrath and blank mutiny for several minutes and a half. You couldn't see our military forces for aspersions and dust. When things straightened out I found the rank and file had run their officer round the corner by his coat tail and the most copious portion of his pants, and had thrown his hat after him. Then they elected me in his place, and I paid for more drinks to replace those that had dropped on the surface of the Commonwealth during the late internal commotion. It was now getting dark, and I commanded the publican to bring out provisions. I also told him to remain open all night. He took



the hint, and ran out to buy more liquor—and to explain to all and sundry how things stood.

“The results were amazing. Reinforcements began to pour in before an hour was over. Vega had organized pickets to guard the other entrances to the town—two pickets, I think, of three men each—but they deserted him, and came over to me. He followed, raving, and demanded back his legions, like Titus or some other old Roman, but they only told him to go and fall up a tree and drown himself. That made him froth at the mouth just as if he was full of soap, and once he became so completely lost to all sense of military dignity as to throw road metal at us from a long range. At this I threatened to put him under arrest, and the old man leaped around in his anger, reaching down handfuls of the atmosphere. He even tried to find his aged colleague—his father, I fancy—to help him attack us, but the venerable one had hidden himself in the backyard of Don Ramiro de la Mullock and couldn't be discovered. I was kept busy examining recruits and ordering drinks and cigars. All the recruits passed except one, who was rejected on account of senile decay—in fact, he died of old age next morning. The civil population simply rolled in. From being the commander of a corporal's guard I was rapidly rising to be a general of division. My popularity was immense. Everything I said was greeted with applause; in fact, the army corps often applauded simply because it thought I looked as if I was going to say something. It was all very gratifying, but all the same I wasn't so inflated with success as not to realise that the position, from a military point of view, was wholly unsatisfactory.

“In the first place, I had no news of the approaching enemy. The army of Crump—I mean Castillo—might be anywhere. It might be near or far. It might even then be entering the town and taking me in the rear. If anybody possessed any information on the subject, it was Vega, the policeman,



for he had the telegraph office to fall back upon; but when about 11 p.m. I tried to open friendly communications with him his language was simply unspeakable. It couldn't have been read in open Court, and if it had been written out and handed up to the magistrate it would have set the paper on fire. If the magistrate was any sort of a drinking man and had become old and combustible, it would have set him on fire also. There was no information to be got from Vega. I sent out some scouts myself, and at first I was surprised that not one came back. However earnestly I peered down the dark road ahead there was no sign of them. Then I gave up wondering, for on going to inspect the rear of my forces I found all the scouts there. They were so afraid of being out of the next round of drinks and cigars that they had simply run round the public house and rejoined me. If the two Clays had been there I would have told them to reconnoitre, but they had never been visible since the campaign opened. I tried to send one messenger to them and another to the telegraph office, but they met the same fate as my scouts.

“The position became so difficult that I resolved to leave the publican in charge of my forces, and look for the Clays myself. I could see that the need for reliable subordinate officers was acute. Here a new difficulty arose, for my devoted followers wouldn't let me go unless I left five dollars security behind me. I went on these humiliating terms, as a field marshal on bail, and straightway fell into a trap. It has been truly said that hell has no fury like a policeman scorned. Round the first corner I came upon Vega lying in wait with all the other drink sellers of the town. They were as mad as he was, for they had done no business that night. By extraordinary velocity I escaped, and got back to my command.

“So far as I was able to see now, the position could hardly be worse. My troops were plainly unreliable. They kept the five dollars, and became

quite familiar. They called me 'old rooster' in the Spanish language. Vega's crowd really looked a much better fighting proposition than mine, for though it was small it was full of energy and closely united, and it had a fixed object in view. I was the fixed object. I began to realise that the constable was a strategist of no small tonnage. If the other enemy—I mean the invading forces of Ferguson—came upon us, the infuriated functionary was quite capable of throwing his publicans on our rear, and that would mean strategic ruin. The military chest was giving out, too, and my voice was almost destroyed with the deliverance of patriotic appeals to the soldiery. I had to appeal loudly on account of the applause that I mentioned already.

"In the small hours of the morning there was an extraordinary barking of dogs, but I paid little attention to it at the time. My mind was too full of other matters. Troubles were accumulating fast, and the end seemed to come all in a moment. My men began to fall asleep, and the few who could be aroused threatened bloodshed, and dropped off again. My publican abandoned us. An emissary had reached him by the back door with a cordial assurance that his rivals, crazed by loss of trade, would assuredly burn his place down next day—and he wanted to get rid of us at almost any cost. He became uncivil, and he watered the liquor. Desertion set in about 2 a.m., and became acute towards 3. When the constabulary and the Liquor Interest rushed us at five minutes past three there wasn't a semblance of defence save what I put up myself. I landed that traitorous officer of police accurately in the waistcoat with a bit of rock, and doubled him up. Then I ran for my life. The road to the hotel where we had lunched was cut off, so I had to dodge. I calculated that I would circumnavigate the town somehow and get there. Failing that, I would strike the bridge over the Great River, and gallop right out of the Republic.



“ It was a really interesting race. I had only just left college, and there I had been the crack long-distance runner. Vega’s motley force of publicans was left behind in the first ten yards. No publican can run worth a copper. I would have slowed down then and saved my wind, but I was making a circuit in comparatively unknown country, and the hostile crowd had the inside running. Lest I should be intercepted, I sped along at a good pace. And then an awful thing happened.

“ Boys, have you ever seen the devil? Has an apparition ever run by your side? Have you raced neck and neck with a jim-jam? Can you imagine your misguided past taking bodily form and sprinting with you step by step? That all happened to me. The figure was tall and thin. The glimmer of a late moon showed a gaunt face and a black moustache and a tiny black beard. The thing had the ruins of a cocked hat on its head, and it was dressed in a sort of uniform which it must have composed itself—red and white with green stripes. It was not one of Vega’s minions, for it didn’t come out of the town; it rather seemed to rush at me from the open country. Fast as I ran, it kept pace with me, and as we both flew along it gibbered at me breathlessly, but I couldn’t make out what it said.

“ I wanted badly enough to run out of Mexico, but I wasn’t going to trust myself on the long, lonely bridge with a striped jim-jam, if I could help it. I bolted all I knew towards the hotel, and, thank Heaven! there was still one light burning, and it was in the room we had occupied that afternoon. I arrived with a crash, and the jim-jam arrived with another crash. The two Clay brothers were dozing, one in a chair and the other on a couch. Their martial ardour had evaporated early, and they had deserted and gone back to wait for me. The clamour of our entrance awoke them, and they leaped up.

“ After all, the jim-jam was the only good fighting



man we had met that day. He might have his drawbacks, but he was game. He kept the three of us off with a chair till he told part of his tale, and then we bade him put down the furniture and shake hands and be friends. At this point the two Clays went out and lied eloquently to the landlord, who was at the door in his nightshirt, wanting to come in and inspect the cause of the disturbance. I didn't wish him to see me until my position as regards Vega and his horde was better defined. And it would certainly not have done for him to see the jim-jam—for that freak was Hogg himself—the famous Ramon Castillo, I mean.

“ We felt really sorry for him when we learned the details. He had planned an early morning attack on Juarez, but his men insisted on beginning the march at three in the afternoon. It was only by the greatest diplomacy that he contrived to postpone the advance till 7 p.m. Then, after the expedition had boated or rafted across the river in a quiet, out-of-the-way spot, it took more diplomacy to delay further movements until a reasonable hour. In fact, but for a marvel of good luck, by which the party was beguiled along a wrong road in the dark, there might have been a catastrophe. It was very late, and the men were mean and sour and angry at the numerous delays, when a halt was called about a mile from the town in the paddock of one Jones, or Hernando de Soto, or some such person. Here the commander addressed his followers. He told them that they had burned their boats and committed themselves beyond recall. The country was already alive with the troops of the tyrant. That morning he had sent off over 50 telegrams to the leading officials of the district around, throwing off his allegiance and announcing his invasion and his early assumption of the Presidency. (Luckily, the telegraph service was bad, and most of his messages were delayed.) He finished up with a whoop about ‘Victory or Death,’ and shouted ‘Forward!’ in his own language.

“ That broke the exiles right up. In their mild, dunder-headed way they had never once considered that this was just the sort of thing a crazy loon like Castillo would do. They didn't want to meet any soldiers. They didn't crave to encounter the bloated tyrant. They had visions of being captured and shot, or of getting ten years in gaol. They heaped execrations on their eccentric commander, and one of them hit his cocked hat with a branch and ruined it. Heaven knows what more they might have done—murder, very likely—only Pedro de Hermengildo, or whatever the farmer's name was, woke up and, looking out, discovered the army standing on his vegetables. He gave a short yelp of fury and loosed his big dog at the insurrection, thereby causing great alarm. Castillo made masterly use of the diversion. He threw all his small change—about six shillings worth if translated into British money—at his followers, and while they were picking it up he was eating up time and space on the road to Juarez. He dared not go back the way he came, for that way his followers would certainly go, and besides his rear guard was there already, so he risked the town and the bridge. He had recognised in me a fellow-fugitive of some sort, and what he had been trying to say was, first, that he wanted to know if the road ahead was clear of troops, and, second, that it would be a blessed act if I would lend him two dollars, so that when he got across the river he could pay his fare to a place where he had left some more habitable and less conspicuous clothes. He now respectfully renewed these requests, with the additional suggestion that the immediate loan of a suit might be possible. He spoke with reserve and a certain dignity, for he was a gentlemanly jim-jam, despite his ridiculous garb and his rolling eye. Out of gratitude for the shelter we had given him he created me Vice-President of the Republic on the spot, the pomp, dignity and back pay all to begin when his revolution had proved successful.

" We advanced the two dollars with pleasure, and promised to assist in the escape. Our spare wardrobe was over in the American town, for we had brought not even an extra collar with us, but we guaranteed the fallen revolutionist a change of clothes as soon as we got across. The jim-jam thereupon confirmed me in my new title and dignities. And as time was getting on and the air was full of possibilities we stood no further on the order of our going, but went.

" So it came to pass that in the early grey of a Sunday morning I fled headlong out of the City of Free Drinks with a demented general disguised in a tablecloth running by my side. That ended the war. It was Castillo's first and last insurrection. But I gained something out of it. So far as I know, I am still Vice-President of the Republic."

The Man of Greatest Circumference remarked that the tale only strengthened his conviction that any country which abandoned monarchial institutions was certain to fall into the Pit of Degradation.



## The Rhyme of the Prodigals.

**W**E are going back to the husks again, and glad  
to return are we.

We are going back to the swine once more—  
to the swine and to liberty.

We have left behind us the fatted calf, and a loathly  
beast is he.

We were younger sons who had seen the world, and  
the world was great and wide.

We drifted back as broken wrecks on the backwash  
of the tide.

And each had a glozing lie to tell, and each had a  
tale to hide.

Then long and grey came the crawling years of  
respectability,

When we wore our tall glazed hats in church for all  
the world to see.

And the cent we dropped in the parson's plate had  
a hollow note and dree.

For they took us back and they gave us meat, and they  
slew the tasteless veal

(Oh, the ox-tail soup is a gruesome thing, and so is the  
boiled ox-heel),

And in their joy they gave us cow—we had cow for  
every meal.

The feast was spread in our fathers' halls; each had  
veal enough for three.

And we tried to revel like Bacchanals and to howl with  
the olden glee

As we solemnly passed from hand to hand the big drab  
pot of tea.

The girls we knew in the old bad days held the souls  
of men in thrall.

Their eyes were bright, and their lips were red, and  
gracious were they, and tall.

The ones who have called of late hung brown poke  
bonnets on the wall!

They were cheery sinners, the men we knew in the  
days that used to be;

The men we know to-day are long, gaunt streaks of  
misery,

And their monkey beards hang down like moss  
festooned on an old dead tree.

We have left the hide of the fatted calf to dry upon a  
fence;

We left his bones to bleach upon a hill and gat us  
thence;

And we leaped upon the glazed top hats that we bought  
at great expense.

We are going back to the swine again—his curly tail  
we see

Show up against the setting sun, a greeting to you  
and me;

And we'll boil the husks in the pot to-night where all  
the world is free.

And away at home the Elder Sons will wind the clock  
at ten,

And put the cat out carefully, and lock the door, and  
then

Go off respectably to bed like sober-minded men.

## The Deeply Poetic Account of a Midsummer Night's Idyll.

**I**T was a dejected-looking little tropical town situate some 40 miles or more up a hot muddy river that wound back and forward, and back again, and round about as no river ever wound and serpentine before. For eleven weary hours we had been crawling in a steamboat over the surface of this stream until even the shadow of it in the darkness became a weariness to the eye, and as we went along I had tramped monotonously about the deck, and wondered whether my legs would not presently get worn off right up to my chest through sheer exertion and disgust. There was nothing to be heard except the gurgle and swish of the thick, turbid water and the asthmatic snort of the steampipe, and nothing to be seen except now and then the dusky image of a bald and naked stump on the bank, and nothing to speculate about except the chance of climbing safely over the next snag, and the dim probability of crowding successfully round the next corner, for the river was low, and, as a consequence, it was even a shade more angular than usual. Even a bird flying across it would be likely to lose its way and find itself back on the shore it started from, and whether there was only one shore altogether, or whether there were two, and both of them were the other one, I never knew. Generally, we seemed to be plunging with a sough and a groan into the very middle of a dense black shadow that rose up like a wall in front of us, and then just as we touched it the vessel would fly off at a tangent and make a sudden burst for the bank, and when it



got there the bank would somehow prove to be absent, and we would puff unconcernedly over a stretch of dead black water until it was time to make another break and bolt madly for a tree standing out on the extreme end of a low headland. But the tree would also melt away mysteriously, and the headland would vanish, and after that all would go well till we started to perform some more calisthenics, and make a fresh jump for destruction. Then we would steer uneasily round some more corners, and the escape-pipe would blow forth a note of shrill derision, and next we would graze a ketch loaded with pumpkins, and the captain would blaspheme from the deck and ask us, with an anguished cry, where we supposed we were going to. No one took any notice of him, however; the captain of a ketch doesn't amount to anything.

The steamer was old and slow. The saloon was small, and the cabins were stuffy. The bath-house was on deck, but for some unexplained reason when the crew started to wash the deck the water-supply in the bath immediately gave out, and the crew washed the deck incessantly. I had only one fellow-passenger, and she was a stout lady with a dog attached to a short string. Unfortunately, I trod on the dog early in the voyage, and from that moment the fount of sympathy dried up, and I found myself alone, and my only remaining amusement consisted in gazing at the monotonous bank, and getting out of the path of the cook when that artizan in boiled mutton fled along the deck with a large dish in his hand. But there was no thrill in either of these dissipations, and so a feeling of deep and holy joy filled my soul when our vessel coughed up to a wharf, and I scrambled ashore.

There was a steep clay bank behind the wharf, and on top of it the last earthly possibility in the way of a hotel loomed up against the stars. It seemed to have been built mainly of old boards and disused gincases, but the materials could not be very well defined in the darkness—there was merely a prevailing aspect

of jaggedness that belonged to no recognised order of architecture, and beyond it there was a hazy and undefined street which appeared to have fallen down dead while only half grown. The street ran parallel to the river, and consequently there was mud at one side and real estate at the other—the mud being much the more numerous of the two. As for the population, it had only one visible representative—a small, fat, old man, who stood at the door of the hotel with a candle, awaiting the course of events. He was a confidential old man, too, and when he had conducted me into a bedroom with two windows and one solitary chair and a stuffed cat in it, he leaned up against the wall and conversed affably, while I hung my hat on the bedpost and listened, with one boot in my hand and my senses buried in partial oblivion.

His daughter had eloped that morning, it appeared, with a gentleman in the paving-stone and road-repairing industry, and his wife had been upset in her finer feelings and had gone to bed. She had remained there all day, and it had been found necessary to apply stimulants to keep her up, and in consequence of this disaster he had been compelled to run the hotel himself, and wash up the dishes, and perform other menial duties. For his own part, he had never looked with a favorable eye on the gentleman who repaired roads, and he was inclined to think that, as a son-in-law, he would prove a failure. He had a dull far-away sound as he related these circumstances, and a thick haze seemed to gather round him, and by-and-bye his sentences appeared to fall to pieces, and I fell asleep in a sitting position and dreamed that his voice was a rushing river somewhere—and then I awoke with a sudden wrench which seemed to tear all my joints asunder, and found him still talking. The candle had burnt low and the grease was guttering on the floor, and he had evidently got to the end of the original subject, for he was relating the incidents connected with a gold rush, or a shearing riot, or something of



the sort. I suggested briefly that I was going to bed, and he faded out of the door, and came back with a fresh candle, and faded again, and came back once more to supply some further information, and then he faded away for the third time, and I rushed at the door and locked it to keep him out. After a while he returned and made a frantic struggle to get into the room, but, failing in this, he retired with a heavy sigh and went to bed.

The little town was unutterably still. There was a ripple on the water, but it was merely the impalpable ghost of an absent sound, and was hardly more definite than the footsteps of the moonlight as it began to steal softly through the window. But despite the stillness and my own weariness I could only lament inwardly, and accumulate cramps. Sleep had left me. By-and-bye, however, I began to drift into that undefinable condition when a man is always doing something and never getting it done, or perpetually falling down somewhere and never reaching the bottom, or is filled with the tail-end of a thousand brilliant ideas and loses them all the next instant. Probably I might have dropped off, only the afflicted landlady suddenly went into hysterics over her lost daughter and filled the building with shouts and disjointed observations.

Probably her husband emptied a water-jug over her, for she dropped screaming and took to scolding instead. She was evidently in the next room, and it was also evident that she was a large female, for I heard her come out of bed with a thud, and then there came a series of hollow reverberations as she plunged and gambolled about on the floor. The next moment a window opened, and a long white figure galloped along the unsafe and treacherous-looking balcony which fronted the building. Another figure, a short, fat one, appeared in the moonlight a second later and went by at a resolute trot carrying its pants in one hand and a hat in the other, and presently a wild-looking object



also flew by throwing its limbs out in great, loose strides, and uttering Irish ejaculations of surprise. There was an excited argument at the other end of the balcony, and the hysterical female seemed to make several efforts to throw herself over into the street, but at length she became pacified, and returned in a faint and limp condition—in other words, her husband trailed her along in a series of short jumps, and puffed a good deal under the exertion. He wore his hat over one ear this time, and carried his pants in his teeth. The third individual did not assist, but as the landlord jumped his insensible prey back through the window that fainting lady partially woke up and gave her follower notice to quit the house in the morning.

The place grew quiet again after this—all except a dog-and-goat fight in the street below. One of the combatants gave away most of his ear in the course of the difficulty, and the other had his tail wrecked. Finally, they both departed in a cloud of dust, and escaped over the horizon, and left silence behind them, and I resolved to go back to bed again, and fall asleep.

The bed was not favorable. It seemed to be stuffed with bricks and coal, and it described such an angle to the horizon that I had to brace my feet against the lower end of it in order to keep my position. This is a hard world, and if my feet slipped it was evident I would fall on to one of the hardest parts of it. When I realised this fact I sat up and made a remark—a long infuriated remark which was unfit to print, and while I was making it the bed-clothes slipped on to the floor and when I hauled them up they were tied in a hard knot, so that when I tried to get into them I merely came out again at the other end. Then I looked for the candle, with a view to putting things right once for all, and I found it so suddenly that I filled my eye with grease and wick, and in my anguish I prayed that the eleven devils which howl for ever round Judas Iscariot might trample on the person who

made the bed and on all his or her descendants till they became extinct.

It was just at this moment that I noticed someone pounding at the front door, and when I listened intently I became aware that there was an individual in tears on the footpath below. I opened the window and implored her in a loud voice to go home—to go and sleep on the fence—to go to bed—to go to Palestine if she preferred it, but, anyhow, to keep quiet and go, but as she still wept and pounded I went out on the balcony and considered the situation with my ungreased eye.

There was a girl below with a carpet-bag and a hat-box, and she was wailing bitterly and rushing at the door with her feet. Sometimes she jumped at it with both feet and at others she took running kicks with only one, and between these exercises she would put her inflamed eye to the keyhole and pray for admittance. Evidently she was in dire distress, and for a while I was in doubt whether to be a father to her or whether to look at the matter from a purely selfish standpoint and empty the contents of the water-jug over the balcony. While I was debating this point she sat down in the road and threatened to grow hysterical, and then I suddenly gave way to a sympathetic mood and addressed her.

"Here," I shouted, "for heaven's sake stop that row, and go away."

"Let me in," she responded.

"I can't," I answered briefly. "It isn't my hotel, and anyhow I'm not in full dress. Besides, I don't know where the door is, and I want to go to sleep, and I wouldn't let you in anyhow. What on earth are you weeping in the street with a carpet-bag for?"

Apparently this aggravated her, for she began to bang the door with stones, and then I put my head in at the window of the next room, and roused the landlord, and informed him that an insane girl was reducing his house to general smash. He came out



with a gun, just in time to find his daughter breaking the bar-window. It was evidently an irresponsible outburst on her part, for when he hailed her with considerable reproach she broke down miserably in the gutter—and explained.

She was the individual who eloped that morning, and she had come back to report that marriage had been a failure. The bridegroom had taken her home, and had straightway gone out with some old-time bachelor friends, and consequently she had packed her carpet-bag and her hat-box, and run for the old public-house in a repentant mood. As there was evidently nothing else to be done her male parent opened the door and threw the carpet-bag and the hat-box into the passage. Also, he admonished his daughter severely on the stairs, and, judging from sundry sounds that reached me, that young lady went to bed in a repentant mood.

Then I went to bed also, and lay down with the clothes rolled up in a hard ball on my chest, and fell asleep till the steamer at the wharf commenced to blow its whistle with a melancholy cadence that broke off into shrieks and variations at intervals, and filled the town with a solemn note of woe. At the same moment a rooster eight feet high began to offer a few remarks in the back-yard, and a man went by shoving a barrow with an ungreased wheel. I sat up in bed, and consigned the rooster, and the wheelbarrow, and the distracted mother in the next room, and the broken-hearted daughter with the carpet-bag to all the infernal gods, and then I began to smoke. It was rather difficult work, owing to the extreme steepness of the bed, and I had to hold my head down with both feet in order to preserve my equilibrium, but I got on pretty well for a while, and then——

Evidently the old woman was awake, and



mourning for her absent child, and evidently also the stern male parent was consoling her with the information that the joy and sunshine of their domestic hearth had rushed home through the dust with her clothes in both hands, and was now sleeping in a contrite mood in the back room. There was a smothered scream to begin with, and I could hear the fond mother get out of bed with a "woosh!" and scuttle on two ponderous feet down a passage, and into the apartment on the other side of mine. Then I recognised that a crisis was at hand, and I grasped the floor with both hands, for it was certain that this explosive ancestor would either weep the roof off with tears of joy, or else would spank her prodigal daughter there and then, and in either case I expected the house to totter on its foundations. As it happened, she did both, but it only accelerated the row in a very small degree, and I felt comparatively resigned—on the floor. There was a reconciliation first of all, and the young wife rested her tired head on her parent's capacious bosom and forgot her woes—the bosom was hollow, and the head seemed to be uncommonly hard, and I could hear the concussion as they came together. And when the first pathos of the scene was over the mother evidently remembered her offspring's shortcomings, and hit her on both ears with a dishcloth or some similar weapon. But presently they became reconciled again and went to sleep in each other's arms, and the old prosaic father slept placidly in the other room, and there was a great calm and oblivion that lasted till after daybreak. For a time I sat and looked at the lights and shadows which the moon described on the mountains beyond the river, but after a while the mountains grew hazy and indistinct, and the shadows commenced to dance a fantastic waltz before my eyes, and next I put the wrong end of my pipe in my mouth,

and came back to consciousness just as I had swallowed half a pint of ashes. I coughed up most of the consignment, and ate the rest, and then I retired once more, with my head at the lower end of the bed and my feet up in the air, and slept a dreamless sleep.

When I awoke at last someone was ringing a breakfast-bell at the keyhole, and there was over a quart of water in my upper ear. A tropical thunder-storm was raging outside, and a cooling stream of rain descended through the roof just above my head, while another cataract came down in a refreshing manner on my feet. Also the room was nearly afloat, so I dressed hurriedly in the passage. A wild, confused argument was in progress downstairs, for the bridegroom of yesterday had come along at an early hour to demand his wife, and was vociferating in the bar. The storm, it appeared, had aroused him from a deep slumber at the back-door of his deserted home, and inquiries in various directions elicited the information that the angel of his fireless hearth had been seen in a state of distraction outside her father's public-house in the early hours of the morning. He demanded her immediate return, but the young lady remained in bed and sent down a message that for the future they must look upon each other as strangers, and the landlord sat on a keg in a corner and leaned his harassed head against the wall, and the landlady stood with a stony glare behind the bar, and professed to regard the visitor as a perfect stranger who had dropped in by accident in search of refreshment. This was the situation at nine o'clock, but at half-past nine the bride came downstairs and threw herself into her husband's arms, and at a quarter to ten the husband was drinking affably along with his father-in-law, and at ten o'clock the landlady cast off both him and his wife in a tragic manner, and renounced them for ever. Viewed by

daylight I discovered that the heroine was an exceedingly long girl of about seventeen, with a flame-colored head and a nervous wink in the left eye.

When they were gone the bereaved mother proceeded, with an air of Roman fortitude, to count the horn-handled two-pronged forks and other portable articles. Whether they were all there or not I never heard.

My bill was twenty-five shillings.



# The Plans and Specifications of the Curse of the Lost Soul Mine.

## I.

MANY years have passed since I struck Bildad's Creek, a little ruined mining town dropped down to dream and moulder among the peaks which line the Goulburn Valley, in Victoria. It lies away from all the main lines of traffic, but anyone who chances to take a certain back-track, leading to no place that any man could have a reasonable desire to arrive at, may chance to find it sprawling in a little valley, as if it had fallen heavily while on its way to some more desirable part of the earth and never got up again. The road consists mostly of a dizzy climb into space. Over many zig-zags it totters heavenwards, until at last the summit is reached, and then a tremendous rush downwards and a fall that seems to have no end brings the traveller or his remains into Bildad's Creek. Most strangers reach Bildad's in a sitting position and with the wreckage of a smile on their features. There is something of an amusing character at the top of the mountain—I forget the nature of the thing, but I know it is there—and the visitor is in the act of laughing at it when he reaches the end of the earth and descends in a dishevelled heap right into the abyss, and brings up opposite the door of the local hotel. When the first pilgrim thus shot himself down he probably created a little surprise among the inhabitants, but the township gradually got used to such visitations in the halcyon days when

Bildad's Creek was a real goldfield, and diggers were crowding in at the rate of one or upwards frequently, and they take things philosophically now.

When the settlement was first built I never learned. For a number of years, however, it has gaped wearily along in a state of subdued helplessness, and has waited patiently for the muddy little torrent which gallops past its door to wash down good luck and deposit it in front of the post-office, and thus promote a great industrial resurrection. But the river never seems to fulfil its mission. Now and then, however, it rises and overwhelms the hundred square yards of ground on which Bildad's is built, and then the township hangs on to something in order to withstand the rush of the waters and remarks that the weather seems to be damp. A long course of experiences of this sort has filled the inhabitants with a general aspect of holding on to something; if they are addressed suddenly they generally moor themselves to a fixed object before replying, and this tendency, so far as I could learn, is hereditary and incurable. Now and then a stranger of great mental force and wide intelligence who has drifted in a lonely caravan of one across the Flour-Bag—the huge, obstinate-looking, dromedary-shaped peak which looms up between the petrified silence of Bildad's Creek, and the more cultured woe of Johnsonville—arrives in the sudden manner already described, and brings with him an air of misplaced confidence, but in less than twenty-four hours the slumbrous influence of the settlement takes possession of him and he begins to lean up against things in unison with his exhausted surroundings. Nothing ever happens at Bildad's Creek, or if it does, nobody ever wakes in time to see it. Now and then, perhaps, a slate is blown off the roof of the little church—the only building in sight which seems to have been roofed at all except by accident—but though the inhabitants as a whole are well-disposed towards the Christian faith, they invariably let it lie. Possibly they indulge a faint

hope that it may one day be blown on again, but this seldom takes place. Apart from the church, Bildad's is built chiefly of boulders, jam-tins, firewood, and bits of rusted machinery removed by hand-power from one or other of the various claims that are caving in all round—or, rather, it would be more correct to say that it is repaired with these diverse materials, for what it was originally built of is not recorded even in legend. Connoisseurs who study the formation of the settlement can still trace in the different styles of its architecture the various stages in the material progress of Bildad's and can point out the tide marks which record the ebb and flow of its chequered fortunes. There are buildings propped up with gin-cases and the remains of brandy-kegs—these are the relics of an old-time burst of prosperity when Bildad's floated its intellect in strong drink and gave way to public rejoicings. Following this comes an era whose history is written in the wreckage of tea-chests and sugar-bags—an era when the township was sobering down and realising by degrees that life is not all liquor and mirth; and a little further along the solitary thoroughfare appear traces of another and more degenerate age, whose footsteps consist mainly of bricks and bark and the covers of ancient Bibles—melancholy relics of a period when Bildad's began to go back upon the faith of its ancestors, and to regard religion mainly as an institution which requires no physical exertion and which is not heavy to lift. Lastly, a period of desolation shows a casual architecture of tents.

Despite the versatility which enables it to make use of so great a variety of material blessings, however, there are times when Bildad's is in low water, and then it generally settles down to wait until some portable article of value slides down from the adjacent mountains into its backyard. Sometimes this visitation takes the form of a fallen tree. Now and then a belated cow which has reached out too far into space comes



tearing through the atmosphere. Whatever it is Bildad's accepts it with the calm of a town which is accustomed to have its blessings shot down at it from the upper air, and after an interval of judicious contemplation it fills the valley with an appeal to "Bill" to come and lend a hand. One of the most striking peculiarities of Bildad's Creek lies in the fact that the whole male population is more or less named Bill. This state of things has become so deeply fixed that anyone whose name is not Bill would find it necessary to tear up the old tradition by the roots before he could assert his status as a separate citizen. But perhaps, on the whole, it is better and more profitable to let the tradition slide. It establishes a bond of brotherhood in a dejected region where some such softening and refining influence is much wanted, and in addition to this valuable moral effect it furnishes a beacon for any casual stranger who may chance to be belated in the land, or lost among the long grass of the damp hillside. Twice, in the days when I had taken to roaming over the peaks with a pick-axe after the fashion which prevails in the Goulburn Valley, did I find myself, as night came on, a lost atom roosting on a dripping rock, with a fog all around, and nothing but an unspeakable sense of emptiness and disgust for a guide, companion, and friend. Each time I rent the listening air with splitting shrieks for "Bill," and each time a stentorian prospector heard me and answered back from the depths of the public-house on the Creek with a blood-curdling whoop which shook the adjacent ranges on their rocky throne. It was not a musical cry, for the frequent Bill of Bildad's Creek is not built to be a lightsome son of song, but it was more welcome at the moment than the notes of the heavenly choirs; and when I had located the voice and shinned down the track to the creek, and crossed by means of the fallen tree which served for a bridge, I would fall violently into the place where refreshment was supplied for man and beast—particularly beast—

and tell the loud-mouthed digger who had answered my appeal that he could regard me in future as a brother without any extra charge.

## II.

The Lost Soul claim is, in its way, one of the leading features of Bildad's Creek. It was a place with a curse upon it. It embraces the whole of a reasonably large mountain right opposite to the hotel and conveniently adjacent to the post-office, so that if, at any time, a Melbourne syndicate should chance to write to the owner offering him £750,000 in cash for the property there is nothing to prevent him receiving the letter with all reasonable despatch. The Lost Soul claim dates back to the beginning of Bildad's, and it promises to hold out till the other institutions of the place have crumbled away, and the valley itself is filled with debris and grit and unsaleable mining scrip and other wreckage. Somewhere in the days before the public-house was built one Bill Wetter fixed his eye upon the spot and resolved that there he would lay the foundations of his fortune. Accordingly he took up a lease and inserted six tunnels in the most hopeless portions of the property, and in the course of five years he successfully disencumbered himself of all his worldly assets without once striking even the semblance of wealth. Finally he mortgaged the property to a person named William Thompson, and instead of using the money thus obtained in a further search for the precious metal, as agreed upon by the parties to the transaction, he feloniously settled down on the lower parts of the claim and commenced to grow potatoes on the only spot where these vegetables could hold out without being individually tied to the earth with a string. His end was of a melancholy and tragic character. One summer afternoon, when he was considering the profits of his agricultural enterprise, Thompson arrived with a view to foreclosing on the property, and brought with him a large book and a



pencil with which to take an inventory of the extensive machinery and plant, and to note down the various signs of mineral riches which he expected to fall over at every step. There was a brief and stormy interview, which Thompson, who was unused to mountain climbing, maintained on all fours; and it was afterwards attested by reliable and independent witnesses that in the course of the remarks Wetter was distinctly heard telling his partner to "keep his hair on." Then the pair started uphill towards the nearest tunnel, but just at the steepest part of the ascent the ancient prospector lost his footing and, falling backwards, overwhelmed his partner, and when they reached the bottom of the mountain they were so hopelessly entangled that it was practically impossible to sort them out. Thompson's eldest son William shortly afterwards took possession of the property, but the curse which attached to it was too much for him, and when he came up to look at the reef the sight of it undermined his constitution and he took a series of fits on various parts of the lease, one of which ended fatally. His remains were interred without ostentation, and when the obsequies were over the grandson (William) of the original Thompson inherited the Lost Soul claim, but he was bitten by a horse on the second day of his proprietorship, and his worldly goods reverted to an obscure uncle who was generally looked down upon by the family. In the case of this gentleman the anathema had evidently worked backwards, he having been partially paralysed for many years—a circumstance which was generally ascribed in well-informed circles to the fact that he was the destined owner of the Lost Soul mine; and this view of the case gained considerable support from the events which followed. Two months' possession of Wetter's enterprise ate away the props of Thompson's uncle's fortune, and gnawed the pillars of his house asunder, and after bearing up as well as he could for that brief period he went down to the bank in a go-cart and



executed an assignment of his estate. The manager took possession in due form and registered himself as owner of the mine at Bildad's Creek, and the very next day he fell over a sleeping dog on his own doorstep, and turning a hurried somersault received such severe damage to his digestion that he was compelled to live on a slop diet for the rest of his life.

After this there was a temporary calm in the affairs of the Lost Soul property. A junior clerk, it is true, fell and broke his leg while going up to some Government department to attest a large document relating to the mine, and a wealthy speculator fell off a balcony and was killed two hours before the time at which he was to have met the bank manager who lived on a slop diet and purchased the claim for a satisfactory figure. Otherwise the moral atmosphere remained calm and untroubled. At the end of nine months the bank succeeded in effecting a sale to a gentleman named William Smith, who gave his bill for £500, payable at six months from date, and the directors congratulated themselves on being rid of an unsatisfactory transaction. The office-boy who went out to post the letter in which Mr. Smith's offer was thankfully accepted disappeared mysteriously next day and was never heard of again, but on the whole things went smoothly.

Mr. Smith constructed a ten-head battery on the spot where the primeval Wetter's potato-patch had stood, and proceeded to contuse himself badly in his exploration through the crumbling tunnels, and down the sloppy winzes, and around the aggravating angles which were the principal features of his new venture. He is still remembered at and around Bildad's Creek as the only man who ever went mining in these parts with an umbrella, but his principal claim on the gratitude of the inhabitants lies in the fact that he was the only white person on record who, by any chance, found anything in the unprofitable mazes of the Lost Soul property. Walking rapidly with a lantern

through the lowest tunnel on the first day of his proprietorship he concussed heavily against something which he didn't know was there, and a minute later he emerged in a pallid state, with his hair standing up and frightful clamors issuing from his head. He slid down the hill backwards, turning somersaults as he went, plunged wildly across the creek, and finally sat down and gibbered in the roadway opposite the hotel. This unlooked-for conduct on his part led to some explorations which were conducted by two able-bodied citizens and a dog, and their researches were presently rewarded by the discovery of a skeleton sitting in a corner of the tunnel, with a bottle in its pocket and its mouth filled with bread and cheese. The funeral which ensued was charged to Mr. Smith, and after this sad event he pined away visibly and became reckless in his habits. He hired more miners than could find standing-room on the property, and commenced to blast the hill away in every direction, and finally he blew most of his own hair out by the roots while firing a charge. This disaster left him completely bald, and a hair-restorer which he used shortly afterwards in the hope of alleviating the domestic calamity which had fallen upon him completed his ruin. How it came about no one knew, but a chemist who lived 18 miles off in a north-easterly direction, and who started over the hills to prescribe for the patient but lost his way and wandered about in the rain without food for a night and two days, advanced a theory that the fluid must have soaked through one of the bruises on Mr. William Smith's head and so reached his brain, to impair and undermine an otherwise valuable intellect. At all events, on the second Saturday after his disaster, Mr. Smith declined to pay the men in his employ, and when they called on him in a body to make representations on the financial aspect of the question, he pointed out to them that the money market was crippled owing to the high premium then offering for gold in Paraguay, and explained that he never paid in notes on



conscientious grounds, these means of exchange being frequently tainted with microbes and carrying with them the germs of infectious disease. For a few days subsequent to this collapse Mr. Smith travelled about the township uttering shrill whoops at intervals, and, finally, after an ineffectual endeavor to catch a kangaroo with his hands, he hired the baker's horse for 10s. and left for other parts. His bills were duly dishonored on presentation, and the Lost Soul claim was once more in the market.

### III.

Three weeks after the fiasco of Mr. William Smith, an Irish gentleman named Bill Higgins came forward and put his mark at the foot of a bill for £750, and the ruinous mine had a new owner. It was, as he frankly admitted, the first time he had signed a document of this description, and it was only after a long consultation with his spiritual adviser, in the course of which he assured himself that he could not be hanged for non-payment, that he ventured his soul in pen and ink. Mr. Higgins' outward aspect was not suggestive of wealth, but as the bank officials justly argued, if they kept on selling the mine to everybody who turned up there was a fair chance that some day one of the many proprietors might strike enough gold to enable him to pay for it. So the transaction was concluded, and Mr. Higgins arrived at the Creek on foot to take possession. He brought with him a long-handled shovel with which to dig out the great masses of pure gold which he understood were on the spot, and a gun to defend his treasure to the last gasp, also forty rounds of ammunition, and a complicated species of fog-signal with which to summon assistance in case he should be overpowered by a piratical horde bent upon wresting his millions from his grasp. But after a cursory glance at his new sphere of industry his mood changed, and the township was shocked to hear the worst-disgusted Celt in Victoria holding forth regardless of cost in the public



thoroughfare. In the course of a long and complicated anathema he consigned to chaos the town and the whole surrounding district, the mine and all the machinery thereto attached, and everybody connected with the property, and everybody who had ever seen it or anything like it, and everybody who had heard of it, or who knew of anybody who had heard of it. Then, gathering renewed vigor as he went on, he poured out the vials of his wrath afresh, and denounced the public-house for being opposite to such a hopeless proposition, and the post-office for being adjacent to it, and he heaped a great anathema on himself for being there, and on the place in general for being there to hold him, and he used the greater and lesser excommunication upon the banking institution which had sold him the property, with sundry side allusions to a restaurant kept by a man named Finnigan because it was next door to the bank, and a few stray expressions of violence directed at everything, animal, vegetable, and mineral, which had not been covered and embraced by the previous execration. He also expressed his contempt for the past, the present, and the future. This public function being completed, Mr. Higgins deliberately fired off his forty rounds of ammunition at the crushing plant and threw stones and mud at the claim generally, after which he retired for the night in a wooden hut on the lee side of his property. His reign lasted eight days altogether, and it rained heavily all the time. It was under the Higgins' regime that Bildad's first learned the vast resources of the British language, and this was practically the only trace which he left behind him. On the ninth day after his arrival his admiring fellow-citizens hired the baker's omni-present horse as a means by which the new owner of the Lost Soul might get as far as Johnsonville on his return to town, and a deputation broke the news to him, and informed him that he would have to tear himself away because he was creating insomnia. The Irish speculator, as it chanced,

was unable to ride, but his innate delicacy forbade him to decline the mistaken kindness of his neighbors, and he alternately towed the horse behind him and chased it in front of him over the long-drawn miles of that weary journey. When at last he arrived at his destination he paid for a feed for the equine impediment which had harassed him on his way, and hired a boy who had never been in those parts before to return the animal to its owner. Then, discovering the youth's geographical infirmity, he accompanied him six miles on the return track, after which he bestowed a parting kick on the steed, and bade the youth deliver along it with a certain hundred-jointed remark and awful entanglement of plain and fancy denunciation which he entrusted to his care, with strict injunctions that it was to be delivered while hot.

#### IV.

Excepting for the advent of a small, ordinary-looking man with a chastened expression and a watery eye who took possession of the Lost Soul mine, and having murdered his wife buried her on the ground, nothing of any importance happened for some months after Mr. Higgins' departure. But at length—an evil spirit having entered into me, and being deceived and led away, or else being under the influence of chloroform, morphia, opium, ether, or other chemical preparations—I was induced to purchase the valuable property which had languished so long on the banks of Bildad's Creek. Having concluded the fatal bargain, I started along the rocky track which had been trodden hard by the multitude of my retreating predecessors. Most of them had left their traces at one point or another of the road, and once in every mile or thereabouts I roused ghostly recollection of a previous owner or fell over some aged local prophet who had a tale which he wanted to unfold. Among those moral footprints the freshest were those of Mr. Higgins. But in addition to this I found some faint indications of

Wetter, the founder of the enterprise, and his partner, Thompson, who seemed to have passed through the district in a subdued caravan of one shortly before the fatal day when they fell off the property with Thompson underneath. Furthermore, an aged hotel-keeper with a roadside license told me how he had, on one occasion, been wakened up in the middle of the night by shrieks and howls and sounds of eerie laughter, mingled with the rush of galloping hoofs, and how he was convinced that this was the deranged Smith and the baker's horse on their joint road to ruin. Also, he was filled with a dismal tradition of the time when twenty-five of Smith's unpaid miners rushed his premises and drank the establishment dry, and laughed a Hollow Laugh when he asked for payment, and told him that they were unable to settle the bill because the boss was away looking after the drain of gold in Paraguay. Then they smiled a Fiendish Smile—the whole twenty-five of them—and went on their riotous way towards civilisation.

Under the influence of these and other cheerful reminiscences I propped myself up outside the Bildad's Creek hotel at a late hour and in a pensive frame of mind. Opposite the building a great, wet, hulking shadow loomed up and stared at me. From its shape and the inherent emptiness of its aspect I recognised my new property. I cast just one look at it, and went indoors. The landlord regarded me with a pitying eye when I introduced myself, and showed me to an apartment which sloped so steeply away from the rest of the building that I was liable at any moment to lose my balance in it and bring up with a shock against the wall. Then he went silently away, and came back surreptitiously with a Bible, which volume he left on the table that I might look up comforting passages if, at any time, I chanced to find myself sinking. Inspecting the book I found that it had been annotated and roughly illustrated by Mr. Smith, evidently in the days when that gentleman was in a lank and melancholy



mood, a sketch of fourteen devils chasing a skeleton down a steep hill being the most conspicuous of the series. The skeleton carried a coffin under one arm and a tombstone under the other. Another design apparently represented a mediaeval lover serenading his mistress as she leant out of the window of a baronial castle, while a fierce-looking person—presumably a rival with murder in his heart—approached on all-fours. They were a cheerless series, and when I inspected them I began to wonder if I would also, in course of time, become an artist at Bildad's Creek, when the solitude and the ghosts of the Lost Soul mine had eaten into my consciousness and made me a wreck.

I spent nearly a week at Bildad's, and ran imminent risk of breaking my neck at least twice a day to no profitable purpose. Possibly I might have really broken it in course of time, but, as it chanced, the opportunity was denied me. About eight o'clock one cold morning my affairs came to a crisis. I had awakened to the gentle murmur of the creek, and had just ceased climbing the slippery rocks of the Lost Soul claim in my dreams, when my bedroom door opened and a stranger burst in. He evidently expected that the floor would be level, which it was not, therefore he lost his balance and crossed the room with one tremendous leap, and then with an ejaculation he drove his head into the opposite wall and, rebounding, sat down on me. When he recovered, which was after some time, he regarded me with an arrogant expression in his eye, and evidently imagined that I had assaulted him. Smothering his indignation, however, he informed me that he had arrived to take possession of my mine under the authority of a certain blue document two feet long and eight inches across at the waist. This publication was connected in some way with a law-suit commenced against someone that I had never heard of before, by some person with whom I was entirely unacquainted, but who professed to represent certain claims against the William Thompson who

had suffered from fits on the property. It set forth that under the authority of the Supreme Court of the State of Victoria I was required to give an account of all precious metals extracted from the mine during the period of my occupation, and to surrender to the custody of the said honorable court all plant, machinery, implements, water-rights, easements, quartz mined but not yet crushed, timber, freehold and leasehold property, and all other matters whatsoever connected with the estate, pending a settlement of the suit aforementioned, and to proceed otherwise as the court might direct, and to act generally in the manner hereinafter provided. Having made these statements he leaned up against the wash-basin in a state of gloomy grandeur, and waited for a reply. I looked at him in silence for about a quarter of an hour, and then I rose with the blanket wrapped round me, and spoke:

"My friend," I said sternly, "if you will climb the hill opposite you will find twenty tons of iron ruins and one moth-eaten shed without a roof, which comprise the entire plant and utensils of the property which you seem to suspect me of having feloniously abducted. Also you will probably discover about six rare and valuable holes in the ground, which I assure you I have not shifted or otherwise interfered with since they came into my possession. They lead nowhere, and if you follow them carefully you will probably get there. Lastly, if you care to dive under this bed, you will bruise yourself against one lump of ballast calculated to yield 20cwt. of rock to the ton, which specimen comprises the whole of the mineral wealth which I have extracted from the property. And now let go that wash-stand and get out for evermore."

I expect there was a homicidal look in my eye, for he got out instantly.

I don't know who owns the Lost Soul mine now.

## The Dishonest Comedy of Todd's Clothes.

I WRITE this by way of explaining exactly what I know of Todd. I am middle-aged and growing affluent, and I have left off Bohemianism. Todd is middle-aged but not affluent, and he has given up Bohemianism also—and taken to plain beer. He gives his friends—who are mostly seedy and addicted to the same liquor that Todd takes—letters of introduction to me, in which I am requested to find them employment. Also, he asks me through the post to oblige him with small loans, and he speaks of me generally as a person who was struggling in the hinder ruck of journalism till he took me by the hand, and as one who ungratefully dropped him overboard when he had raised me to eminence. I wish to clear my character by telling all I ever knew of Todd, which isn't much, and all I ever wish to know of him, which is less.

It was about twenty years ago when I first heard of him. I was something or other then on a paper Far North, towards the Gulf of Carpentaria, where Original Sin has its residence, in a sweltering, little town by a sweltering, little river which had been accursed since its first beginnings, and had remained more and more accursed ever since. There were four of us in the office—the Old Man, Hopkins, Trane, and myself. The Old Man was very old and rather tired of it all. There is a peculiar brand of Old Man in the North, and every paper has him. Trane was dying of something or other, and was of no particular service. He was a depressed, unfortunate kind of man. The paper had



changed hands often, and the proprietors were apparently an unhealthy lot, for they mostly died, and Trane had broken his leg at the funeral of one of them, and his collarbone at the funeral of another, and caught a fatal cold at the funeral of the third proprietor's wife, and now he was getting ready for his own funeral. Hopkins was a desperately energetic sort of young man who did everything in a sort of a way; and I spent most of my time killing the large green insects which came in through the fanlight. And one burning day, when I had no shadow, and the sixpenny beer was lukewarm, and I couldn't get into the bathroom at my boarding-house because the Mrs. brown dog was rearing a family there, I grew weary of it all, and banded in my resignation to the Old Man.

Next morning Todd rose suddenly from no visible place and secured my position. I didn't see him, but I heard him explaining things in the next room. He had a glib flow of language, and he wore a beautiful new suit, and a straw hat, and he had a barrow-load of the most lovely testimonials on record. He was engaged to start when my notice expired, and, as it chanced, he was staying at the same hotel as Hopkins. That was how all the trouble began.

Todd was also a desperately energetic man, and he took the same size in beer as Hopkins, which created a friendship between them. He wanted to do something in the time he had to spare, and Hopkins introduced him to the Rev. Brown. The Rev. Brown ran a small religious magazine, and his last editor had worn out, so he got measured for a new one, but the new one hadn't yet arrived. So Todd agreed to run his paper, collect accounts, hunt up advertisements, and do all manner of lawful and unlawful things to promote the prosperity of the business during a period of seven calendar days, at the end of which time Brown expected to have a permanent man in hand. The temporary man started next morning, and proved satisfactory beyond belief, and versatile beyond description. On that blazing

day, when everybody else was wilted and broken up, Brown's new man repaired the machine, secured a six months' pill advertisement at a good price, wrote a scholarly essay for next week's issue on the origin and morals of Abraham's uncle, and also a brief business-like article showing how to raise funds for certain much-needed improvements to the church. Likewise he came back in the evening and made out all the overdue accounts, and next day he went out to collect them, leaving behind him a shining reputation for talent and vigor. And then the reputation proceeded to fade like the morning dew on the big gum tree in midsummer. I saw Todd go out to collect these accounts, and I never saw him really clothed and in his right straw hat again.

He was missing for two days before preacher Brown organized search parties. Brown had vague ideas that Todd had gone for a swim in the river in the intervals of energetic and honorable collecting, and that a crocodile had got him, so the river bank was explored both ways. There was no very definite idea of finding him if a crocodile had got him, for the croc' drowns his victims, and then buries them in the mud at the river bottom, and keeps guard over them till they are "high" before he eats them. But he would probably leave Todd's hat on the bank to show where the departed one had gone in, and a footprint beside the hat might help to eke out the tale. Preacher Brown was a conscientious man, who wouldn't dream of abandoning a distressed fellow-creature, so, despite the heat, he plodded away up the river with two friends. And his energy was rewarded, for he found Todd. That shining light, who had written the beautiful essay on Abraham's uncle, wasn't dead. He was drunk, and lying under a tree. His hat had a large piece bitten out of it, and one boot was gone, and he was unclean and profane, and was being walked upon by strange caterpillars.

Brown was a good man when occasion called for

it, but he knew when to drop the good man and come to business. He found the account book in Todd's pocket. Todd had kept it carefully till he became too intoxicated to keep anything, and then he had taken to writing doggerel in it, and had finished up with pencil sketches "in the mood." Preacher Brown tore out the doggerel and the nude sketches, and jumped on them. Then he added up the accounts and found that Todd should have £23 upon him. As Todd had nothing on him but clothes, and the caterpillars, and a locust in his pocket, he was carried back to town in dishonorable custody. It was a fearful job, this conveying of an intoxicated editor three miles down a dusty road, but the preacher never flinched. He delivered Todd (partly sober by this time) at his hotel with an intimation that if the money was not forthcoming by next day he would take criminal proceedings. His new editor, he said sardonically, had apparently taken everything else, including the good character of the paper, but he would take them anyhow. Whereupon Todd hiccupped at Brown and went to bed.

This was about four o'clock in the afternoon. About eight o'clock Todd woke up, put on several of his clothes, came downstairs, and had six drinks in quick succession. Six lukewarm Queensland beers are sufficient to account for nearly anything, and by ten o'clock Todd had an idea that some large, horrible, undefined crime lay at his door. (Not being a householder with a door of his own, this is a mere figure of speech.) So he went out by the backyard stealthily, and fled from justice, feeling himself an outlaw. When he reached the very last pub. as you go out of the town westward he remembered that there was a dry stage of many miles ahead of him, and he had one or two more drinks. These made him even more pessimistic than he had been before. He shed tears on the counter and told the barmaid, who knew him slightly, that he was a lost and ruined man and was



going out West to be an Ishmaelite and a shearer for the rest of his life. Then he set forth under the stars, and the gloom swallowed him.

We heard about this exit late the same night, and then Hopkins, who occupied the next room to Todd's at the hotel, had an inspiration. He was always a seedy and rather frayed-looking youth, and he and Todd were practically the same size. Todd had left much of his wardrobe behind him in his flight. Very early next morning Hopkins annexed all Todd's clothes in a silent sort of way, with a view, as he afterwards declared, of preventing the landlord seizing them for unpaid board, and thus further oppressing an already crushed fellow-creature. When the case came on at the court some time afterwards Hopkins solemnly swore that his intentions towards Todd were so honorable that they amounted to a disease, and that he fully intended forwarding those clothes to Todd by post, along with a sympathetic letter and a few pounds in cash, as soon as he knew Todd's address. And the magistrate said that his conduct, though perhaps technically illegal, reflected the highest credit upon him, and that he appeared to be the only person who came out of the business respectably. The last remark was intended as a reflection on me.

The landlord was a sordid person, and he attempted to seize Todd's clothes for his unpaid board bill. His language, when he found nothing to seize, was unprintable.

So Todd evaporated out of our lives, and Hopkins came down to the office in the morning in all the pomp of a new suit. In the afternoon he turned up in another new suit. In the evening he appeared in still a third outfit. And by about midnight his glory became too much for him, and he burst, in a manner speaking. He told me confidentially that there was a fourth suit and I might have it cheap. I told him that I owed Smith, the tailor, for one suit already, and wasn't affluent enough to buy any more. I was

leaving in two or three days, and was too weary of it all to take as much interest in Todd's clothes as I might have done at other times. But Hopkins was so expansive that we ended by doing a deal. I exchanged my scarf-pin for the suit. Hopkins proudly put on the pin, and I carried a bundle of clothes home in the darkness—and took the curse of the great Todd complication home along with me.

After that for two hot dreadful days nothing in particular happened—except locusts and large spiders and mosquitoes, and the like. I came to the end of my term of servitude, and on the night I was to get on board the steamer and leave the North behind me the Old Man brought in a dozen of something bottled, and we had a farewell. Everybody was there except Hopkins, who was out on business, and the boys said more kind things about me than were ever said before or since. Trane, in particular, shook me by the hand, and said we would never meet again in this world—which was true, for poor Trane died a few weeks afterwards. The Old Man said that my articles on foreign politics would be much missed, and that during my stay in the office I had thrown more light on the machinations of Bismarck than any other journalist in the North. This was also true; Bismarck himself didn't know one quarter the things I had brought to light concerning him. We smoked the cigar of peace all round, and then at last it was time to get on board, so I shook hands, and they all wished me every kind of prosperity. I never knew till then what really good fellows they were, and I felt a trifle hoarse as I returned thanks. But just then Hopkins came up the stair, and without warning or explanation said that I was a thief and a ruffian of the deepest dye, and that I had blighted his prospects for life, and made him a criminal and an outcast, and broken his parents' hearts. Also, he fell on me right there. I saw it was no time to ask for explanations, so I fell impartially on Hopkins, and we both fell down

the stair. There were seventeen steps. I bumped on eight of them and Hopkins bumped on the other nine.

The Old Man, despite his age, was the most prompt and vigorous person in the office. He was also the largest by a long way, and it was he who quelled by main force the tumult that was raging at the foot of the stairs. He held Hopkins asunder while I was held asunder by two compositors, and then Hopkins was called upon for an explanation. He gave it backwards, sideways, and endways, upside down, in fact in every way that could make a story utterly incomprehensible and incoherent. He gave it with one foot in his hat, which had been wrecked as we came down, and with his coat-tails flying and both hands sawing the air, and he denounced me generally as a deceiver and a Borgia and all manner of things. I gathered up part of the story then, and got the rest afterwards by instalments.

It seemed that when Todd fled out of the town that night, escaping from Brown and justice, with a vague idea that he had committed some crime of great magnitude, he didn't go far. He had only fled half-a-mile before it occurred to him that the whole business was profound foolishness, and then he went to sleep beside a fence. When he woke up next morning he was still confused, but he had abandoned the idea of being a wanderer in the West all the rest of his days. Still, he was too much of a wreck to feel like returning to face Brown, and to argue about the lost money and resume his duties. So in the early daylight he stole back to the hotel where he had confided to the barmaid the previous night, and hired a room, and swore the girl to secrecy. He lay down there for two days, partly because he was swollen to unnatural dimensions through being bitten by many strange insects while sleeping under the fence. Finally he took to drink again, and at a certain hour, and just in the middle of a certain drink, he reached the



exact stage of intoxication he had been in when he lost Brown's money. Or rather he hadn't lost Brown's money at all, but had planted it in a hollow stump for safety. Everything came back to him in an instant with preternatural clearness. And fearing it might go away again he dropped his glass, climbed over everybody who stood or sat in the way, and ran. He ran right round the town—it wasn't good enough to run through it just yet—and recovered the cash. That evening, just as the Rev. Brown was sitting down to tea in a composed frame of mind, a decayed apparition called on him and paid him his money in the presence of witnesses, and demanded reparation for the injury done to his character. The apparition pointed out that the pastor's conduct in publicly accusing him of embezzlement, when he was merely suffering from sunstroke, was uncharitable and illegal, and any civil court would award heavy damages. Metaphorically speaking, he wiped the floor with Brown and cast the remnants of him all over the place. When the preacher had partly got over the shock he realised that the situation was a bad one, and he compromised for £20 on the spot.

Then Todd went down to his hotel, paid his bill by way of asserting his dignity and quelling slanderers, and went upstairs to put on a clean shirt before having dinner. It was only when he discovered that his belongings had vanished to the last shred that he burst in real earnest. The effort with which he had overwhelmed Brown was nothing to what he poured forth on the landlord as he demanded his goods and chattels, and referred to the Act which dealt with larceny as a bailee. The landlord could only deny all knowledge of the goods and chattels, and by way of corroborative evidence he expressed certain suspicions of Hopkins owing to that young man's unusual magnificence. So Todd borrowed a clean shirt to have dinner in, and waited. And when Hopkins came

jauntily in with Todd's clothes on there was no end of trouble.

Hopkins was a perfectly local youth of 21, while Todd was 10 years older, and, when sober, equal to any reasonable emergency. Todd, if sober, could have come in with Hopkins' clothes on and carried the matter with a high hand. Hopkins could only wilt. He handed over the belongings in a state of great apology and resumed his shabby suit. When Todd learned that he had only taken the goods to prevent seizure by the landlord he was appeased—he was even grateful. Still when he found that one suit was missing, and Hopkins reluctantly told him he had exchanged it for a scarf-pin, he remarked that there was a pretty large hole in the explanation. He even alluded to our conduct as criminal, and said that I was a receiver of stolen property, but offered to square the case for £100. And when Hopkins offered him the scarf-pin as security he rejected it on the ground that it was glass, and worth 1s. 6d. at most. Which it was. Hopkins had never asked me about the intrinsic value of the gaud his soul coveted, and I had offered no needless explanations.

Hopkins told this story to the Old Man at the foot of the stairs—told it in confused barks till the beginning of it got tied round the end and the middle broke away and blew down the street. I escaped unnoticed in the middle of the narrative, just when he was asserting that I had undermined his previously sound Christian principles and led him into crime. I couldn't return Todd's clothes, for they were in my box in the hold of the steamer somewhere. I didn't want to wait and argue with anybody, or to miss my passage, or to be arrested for stealing Todd's suit—so I just left. I got on board as the steamer was letting go. When it was a dozen yards out and just gathering speed I saw Hopkins and Todd and a policeman and my tailor all coming down to the wharf at great speed, so I went below. When we were

outside I hired certain minions, at a cost of £2, to find and bring up my box, and next night I threw Todd's suit overboard. Something happened at the first stopping place—I was "detained," as it is euphoniously termed, but as the clothes weren't in my possession, and I strenuously denied all knowledge of them, and telegraphed to Todd threatening to have him cast in heavy damages for illegal arrest, nothing came of it. Then Todd sued Hopkins for illegal detention of his garments and for compensation, but Hopkins now denied there had ever been any such garments at all, and explained so convincingly how he had gone to great pains to help Todd in his time of trouble that the case was dismissed with costs. The magistrate even threatened to commit Todd, and called him a blackmailer.

That was the whole of my acquaintance with Todd, and when he alludes to me as a journalistic struggler whom he took by the hand in the bad old days of our youth I hold that the case doesn't justify it. My own opinion is that Todd ought to be deeply grateful to me for something or other—I don't remember exactly what.



## The Lamentable Verse of the Clerks.

FOUR inky desks do moulder here,  
Their leaves are filled with tales of pelf.  
Their hue is that of faded beer,  
And some brown books upon a shelf.

The vagrant wind comes jovially  
With scents of gum-trees to the door,  
And whispers tales of flower and bee,  
And blows Brown's invoice on the floor.

Of cobwebs there are twenty-two,  
And flies hang from them day by day.  
The murky panes command a view  
Of Jenkins' place across the way.

Five dusty hats hang in a row,  
The safe stands stolid by the wall,  
Square, dull, pot-bellied, squat and slow.  
The beetles in the inkpots fall.

The years go by like ghosts that bear  
Big ledgers on a Dead Sea shore;  
The years have letter files for hair,  
And leave ink footprints on the floor.

And here we sit all day and write  
The noble language Shakespeare wrote,  
The while a vagrant sunbeam bright  
Rests upon Jones' office coat.

Our lank and cheerless office boy  
(A youth decked in a flabby hat)  
Doth find his one delight and joy  
In making blots upon the cat.

A beldame in the basement hides  
Who "cleans" the premises by night;  
One Solomons, who deals in hides,  
Owns the back office on the right.

This is where Commerce hangeth out  
In groves of mortar and of bricks;  
Here Trade hath its foundations stout---  
The salary is One Pound Six.

# The Prophetic Horror of the Great Experiment.

## I.—HOW IT BEGAN.

**T**HIS is the tale of the most wonderful experiment ever made in the world, and of how it ended.

My hair is snow-white now, for the experiment bleached it in a few hours. One of my partners is dead, and it was the experiment that killed him. Another is a maniac in an asylum. He lost his senses the day our wonderful scheme fell through, and now he howls in old dead languages about the big halls and corridors of Yarra Bend in Melbourne, and makes night hideous with strange specimens of Sanscrit, and ancient Syriac and Hebrew. He has quite forgotten his mother-tongue; he lost it on the last day of the experiment, and never recovered the slightest shred or vestige of it from that day to this. A fourth member of the party is still living in this city. He is a strangely wrinkled and aged young man; that is to say, he was young when we all went down together to watch the results of our project, and he was old—very old and shattered—when we came up again a few hours later. It was the project that made him old—that project of ours which still haunts us, and refuses to be forgotten. As for the last member of the party, he has gone away somewhere—gone away to travel and forget what we found out that day, if he can forget. But then I know that he never will. Ten thousand years would not be long enough to wipe out the recollection.

No one ever tried harder to forget anything than we have to lose the memory of our discovery—the



most wondrous discovery that any human being ever made, or ever will make until the Last Man is left alone on the dying earth. But none of us can succeed, barring the man who died in the very hour when the problem was solved, and so escaped it. I would like to die too, and lose the great revelation in Nirvana. But then, just because of the revelation, I dare not die. I dare not! So I eat opium instead. That means temporary oblivion. Then I come back to earth again, and remember it all once more.

There is a deserted shaft in a lonely spot on a certain worked-out Australian silver field. Nobody has found it, I believe, since the day it was abandoned. I see it now and then in my dreams; and the great ferns have grown over it, and the trees are springing up around it, and a solitude like that of a dead world is everywhere. Some day, however, it will be found, and the finder will probably fail to notice any difference between it and any other abandoned mine among the thousands which are scattered over the mineral fields of Australia. Then, probably, he will try to sound the depths of that cavity, and will be surprised at its immensity. You might drop a whole cliff down there and not hear an echo of its fall in the void beneath. It is the deepest mine on earth; the deepest that ever will be on earth, for if anyone sinks deeper he will strike something which will put an end to the earth altogether. Even the Deluge was nothing compared to what would have been if we had gone just a little deeper. It goes down—far, far down—into the old ribs and pillars of the world, and in my visions I can still see the fire-blasted, smoke-blackened rocks below, where the sun perhaps used to shine some thousand million years ago, or which stared up into the ebon skies when the sun was still unkindled and the stars unlighted, and there was nothing anywhere save blackness and air. There are lakes and pools in these abysses, where the waters are like a glassy surface of unspeakable Night, and

never a sound arises amid all the miles of solid murkiness, and probably the first shadows ever seen down there were those which we made when we went down on our way to the Discovery.

Nothing in particular ever came out of that excavation—neither gold nor silver nor lead, nor anything else that is useful. Nothing at all, in short, except bare and hungry rock, and the strangest information with which any mortal was ever cursed since Creation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twenty years ago we struck the great idea of exploring the underground world. We were all enthusiasts in matters of geology, and we had an unknown world underneath our feet to experiment upon. Other men had harassed themselves about the frozen Poles, and the mystic lands of Central Asia, and the deserts of Africa; we wanted to explore a land only a little distance away—underground. There were 7000 miles of it which had never been penetrated within historic times, and we had it all to ourselves.

As for our plan, it was simplicity itself. It was simply to start a shaft, and keep on sinking into the unknown, until death compelled us to leave the work to another generation, or till floods or volcanic fire or some other irresistible force brought our scheme to an abrupt conclusion. And if nothing did stop us, the shaft was to go down and down into the very middle of the globe.

We were looking for the unknown—for the hidden mysteries of life, and the story of the buried past. We were seeking for the original home of gold and precious stones—the great deposits whose merest fringes have been found by the seekers after treasure; and for the fires which are supposed to burn for ever in the earth's centre. We wanted to investigate the ancient myths about an interior world in the hollow globe, where subsidiary planets revolve in a toy firmament, and strange races of humanity, or races

that are apart from humanity, have their being. We guarded the idea jealously—so jealously that no one, until to-day, has revealed even a hint of the mystery and how it ended.

It was not an easy secret to keep, but we kept it none the less. Our shaft was situated in a region where, at that time, travellers were few, and those who did come got no information, and, for various reasons, could get none. Our workmen were all Asiatics, and the one qualification on which we insisted was their absolute ignorance of the English language. Daniels, the most enthusiastic member of our company, superintended, his two qualifications being a good knowledge of mining and a better knowledge of Hindustani; and for lieutenant, factotum, and assistant he had Tanjia Topi, an energetic and desperately profane man from somewhere among the Five Rivers. Daniels is the individual who died on the day of the Discovery, and we ran over Tanjia Topi and broke his back in one of the subterranean galleries, in our haste to get away when we made our final exit. No doubt he also died down there, and went over the bridge of Al-Sirat to be with Allah in Paradise. Poor, forgotten, abandoned Moslem—he was a square and honorable Mohammedan, but not for all Paradise would we have gone back to pick him up.

The rest of us subscribed the money and the balance of the enthusiasm. Venables, professor of dead languages at Melbourne, was, curiously enough, the most useful man of the lot. Dead languages are seldom of much use in mining, but in this case they did service. Also Venables has found them come in handy ever since, for he shouts them among the lunatics of Yarra Bend, and asks for his dinner in old Sanscrit roots and broken Hebrew. Raymond was a young and immensely rich Englishman with no knowledge worth speaking of, and he went into the great scheme from pure love of novelty. It failed to answer his expectations for some weary years, and then in one



wild hour he got all the novelty for which his soul had craved, and so long as he lives he will want no more. For my own part, I was the originator of the scheme, and my motive was an insatiable hunger after knowledge. I have got the knowledge now, and I would give up all I possess to buy ignorance in its stead. So would Franz Heller, the remaining member of the company. We meet at times, and eat opium together, and swap visions and dreams, and drink to the memory of Tanjia Topi, lying dead with his broken back in the bowels of the earth, where no one will ever find him till the Resurrection.

As for our gang of Asiatic workmen, we left them all in the depths, and never heard of any of them any more. How they died there I cannot tell. Possibly the thing that we discovered came out (it was halfway out when we saw it) and took them, but this is mere conjecture. None of them knew any dead languages, and, in consequence, they failed to understand the Hebrew warning which enabled us to escape just in time.

This was how the Experiment commenced.

## II.—HOW IT PROGRESSED.

For years the mine produced no results. All through that period Daniels pushed on the work with feverish energy, and no shaft ever went down so fast before. We got through the stratified rocks, and struck granite below, and then for a long while we bored ceaselessly downward, and found nothing at all save rock. There was no serious increase of heat as we went down; there were no caverns, nor traces of primeval man; there was nothing at all, in fact, for 6000 feet and more save solid building material of the most ordinary description. So far it was the baldest, dreariest, most commonplace tale in all history.

Then the solid rock ended, and we struck a new region, where there were vast caverns, and natural

galleries, and black lakes and murky rivers flowing between banks of solid Night. And among them we found a stupendous funnel-like opening—a species of ready-made shaft some thousands of feet deep—and at the bottom of it the air was thick and hot and vaporous, like the breath of a volcano. Evidently the investigation was going to lead to something at last, and we all hurried to the scene of action to watch progress.

In another gallery at the bottom of this natural shaft Daniels had fixed a powerful boring apparatus, and day by day it kept going down through soft, friable rock. And day by day Daniels watched it, and waited for results, and perspired profusely in the burning atmosphere. And Tanjia Topi hurried about looking like a sweltering demon among the shadows. And the rest of us roamed through the rifts and chasms, and speculated on the prospects of the future.

I have crowded the history of all these years into a few lines for a sufficient reason. The tale of the great experiment is really only the tale of one day, and that day was the last one of our enterprise. What we discovered—apart from the final discovery of all—is of small account and hardly worth mentioning.

### III.—HOW IT ENDED.

I had been dreaming that night.

It was a strange dream, too. I imagined that our shaft was the mouth of Gehenna, and that Tanjia Topi was at the bottom. I was fishing for him with a shark hook and twenty-five miles of line, and a Koran for bait; but though Tanjia bit several times, and I once hauled him halfway up with a steam crane, I could never get him to the surface. I was depressed at this failure, and was complaining in cuneiform inscriptions, like those on the old ruins of Western Asia, when I was wakened by Daniels shaking me by the arm.

“Come down, old fellow,” he shouted. “Look sharp! We’re all going! There’s something about to

happen. I don't know what it is, but whatever it may be it's mighty near. I believe there's going to be the biggest circus in that old mine that you ever saw."

I scrambled out of bed faster than I ever scrambled before, and while I was dressing Daniels threw himself all over the room in galvanic jerks, and pervaded the house generally.

"What have you found?" I asked impatiently, while I bounded around in search of my boots and other sundries.

"It isn't what we found—it's what we've heard. There's the father of all rows going on down the borehole; nobody ever heard anything like it."

"What! Going to be a volcanic eruption? We'll be frizzled up down there."

"Volcanic eruption! Not much. It sounds like a whole nation walloping its wife. It's like all the furniture in the universe being smashed right inside the earth. Great Scott! I don't know what it's like. A billion fellows breaking crockery is the nearest to it, only the crockery's ten miles away, you know, and the sounds seem to come through a funnel, you know; and there's guns going off, and a racket like a parrot the size of a mountain, and shrieks; and then you can hear somebody hitting somebody else with a club as big as a tree—or that's what it sounds like, anyhow. And——"

"Daniels, you must be drunk!"

"Drunk—no, of course I'm not drunk. I'll have a drink, though, before I face that place again. You'd better, too. Where's the brandy?"

We had two drinks, and I rushed about madly in search of my clothes. My bedroom was in a wooden shanty about 200 yards from the mine, and the sunshine of the bright spring morning was streaming through the window. The breeze that came in through the casement was laden with sweet scents from the bush on the mountain sides; there were birds singing,



whistling, and twittering on the trees, and the wind came down from the hills with a musical murmur like the babble of far-off streams. And inside the building there was one man, attired in a shirt and one boot, rushing in aimless excitement all over the apartment, and another—muddy, haggard, and in a state bordering on frenzy—rushing round also.

Venables, Raymond and Franz Heller were waiting for us when we burst out of the doorway and ran for the shaft. It was not a dignified exit that we made. I was half-dressed, and being incapable of getting coherently into any more of my clothes, Daniels had simply seized me and galloped for the mine. He left his hat behind him, and when we got jammed in the doorway through both trying to burst out simultaneously I heard one of his braces snap with the unexpected strain. Venables was also in a disorganised condition and hatless, and Raymond had been shaving when the summons reached him, and had come away covered with lather. As for Heller, he was in full dress, with a clean collar and a shiny hat, and his spectacles astride his nose, and looked as calm as if he was in church. Heller was the sort of man who would put on a clean collar on Judgment Day, and brush his hat for the occasion.

As we started down in the cage the telegraph, by which signals were conveyed from the bottom of the mine to the upper air and vice versa, began to ring like a telegraph possessed. Evidently Tanjia Topi was in a tight place down below, and was hanging on to the instrument like a Mohammedan in fits.

“Go like thunder!” shrieked Daniels, as the machine started.

We went like—well, just like the thing Daniels had mentioned. The black walls of the mine seemed to rise around us in one infinitesimal fraction of a second, and shut out the sun and air. The black atmosphere of the mine sprung up in a bound and seized upon us, and the whole earth seemed to be falling away

beneath our feet, so rapidly did we descend. Every 500 feet or so there was a short gallery opening off the shaft, and in each of these an electric light was burning and a telegraphic signal was fixed. I could gauge our speed by the way we shot past these illuminations, and I could also gauge the size of Tanjia Topi's excitement by the riot that was bellowing forth from each signal. Plainly the Moslem down below meant to die at the handle before he gave out.

"I say, what do you think's the matter?" Raymond yelled in my ear. I couldn't see him, and all voices sounded alike in that confined atmosphere; but I knew it was him, for when he had done speaking my ear was filled with lather.

"I don't know," I yelled back. "I think it's everything. Only I wish Tanjia would let go that bell. It sounds as if Gehenna had broken loose."

But when we reached the bottom of the first shaft Tanjia Topi had evidently let go the bell, for there was a dead silence everywhere. Also, there was nobody in sight. We were in a long, natural gallery—so long that we had never explored it to the end; and fully 800 yards along this gallery was the great funnel-like cavity which served as a second shaft, and opened a way further into the bowels of the earth. There was another cage and winding apparatus here, and the subterranean road between was illuminated by electric lights, fixed at short intervals. Very long and silent and shadowy and ghost-like looked that underground highway, and not a trace of a human being could we see in all its length. And yet we had fully expected to find the most frantic of all Asiatics tearing around in this same gallery, and waiting for us to come to his assistance.

"Are they all dead?" said Venables, in a whisper, as we hurried along.

"What on earth would they be dead for?" Daniels retorted, wiping the perspiration of heat or sheer terror off his forehead. "How could twenty-

eight men be all dead, and yet no signs of anything wrong? You're an ass!"

"Vell, who rung dot pell?" suggested Heller.

"I don't know. Can't you wait till we find out?"

We reached the other shaft and found out—absolutely nothing. There were three Asiatics in charge of the cage, and though Daniels addressed them in a whole torrent of language that sounded like cats on a wall, the results were nil. They had heard nothing and seen nobody. They had rung no bell, and nobody else had rung any bell, and no single event had happened at all. They were examined and cross-examined, and turned inside out, all to no purpose, and then we gave it up and entered the cage. Only we entered it very slowly and reluctantly this time, and our enthusiasm had evaporated like a fog in a summer sun. The only remark made came from Heller. In a blank, sepulchral tone he addressed himself to the empty air, and asked again: "Who rung dot pell?"

Nobody answered him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Down in the lowest gallery we found Tanjia Topi sitting like a gaunt bird of prey on guard, and peering with his sombre black eye into the borehole. His report was discouraging.

In the first place he had not rung the alarm, and nobody else had rung it. The weird noises which Daniels had reported had altogether ceased, and our great mine seemed to be exactly like anybody else's mine, so far as any new developmnets were concerned. Tanjia announced that he had got all the men down in case of need but had sent them to work at the further end of the gallery, lest they should be scared by any new and unexpected proceedings; and then he had sat down, with his shifty black eye and his capacious brown ear both on the alert, and had not moved either of them from the spot during Daniels' absence. Moreover, he knew nothing of the amazing



noises which we had heard, or thought we had heard, and altogether he was the most unsatisfactory Mohammedan in all the regions of Islam. I took Heller aside at this stage of the proceedings, and communicated my firm belief that Daniels was very, very mad. But the German only shook his head, and said sadly:

“Who rung dot pell?”

Just then there was a most amazing sound from the borehole—a long, weary sigh, followed by a wail of anguish and grief. I fell back eighteen feet.

“Below, there!” yelled Daniels into the hole. “Below-ow-ow! Who’s there?”

Something came up in response. It sounded like “Yow-yow-wow-wow-wow!” And close behind it there arose a puff of yellow smoke, and a strange odor. Then there was a long pause, and after that I heard one sharp syllable, and if that syllable was not “D——n!” I knew nothing of the English language either then or thereafter. Raymond fled from the hole, and concussed heavily against me in the gloom.

“This i-i-is aw-w-w-w-ful,” he gasped. “It’s the m-m-most surprising th-thing I ever heard in all my life.”

“Berhaps it is the berson who rung dot pell,” said Heller.

There was an unearthly smashing sound just then, and it came right up from the depths of the earth. Daniels and Venables fled on the instant, and Tanjia Topi turned a sudden somersault and ran away on his hands and feet.

The noise seemed to be the noise of voices, and yet they were not human voices by any means. There was a strange metallic note as if a thousand throats of brass were screaming in chorus. Then it slowly died away, and again there arose those faint wreaths of smoke, accompanied by the same wail as before. As he heard it Venables scrambled suddenly to his feet

and addressed us (he had been sitting speechless in a pool of foul water for half a minute or so):

"Bless my soul," he cried. "That's a voice speaking in Hebrew!"

Daniels sat up in his pool of water and looked at him in scorn.

"Hebrew! Just 11,000 feet or so below the surface! And Hebrew, above all things!"

There was another yell from below, and Venables hopped around like a madman.

"That's Sanscrit!" he yelled. "I'll swear to it! I don't care if it's 5,000,000 feet below the surface! And that," he added, as another bark and bow-wow ascended from the depths, "that's an old Coptic root—it is, as sure as fate."

We sat down and looked at each other in a paralytic manner, and Tanjia Topi crawled back from some dark recess and joined us. After that there was an interval of dead silence save for an occasional scratching sound. It was the very loudest scratching I ever heard. If a rhinoceros, forty times bigger than any other rhinoceros, had been scratching himself by steam power with a harrow it would have about explained the situation. The air was growing remarkably hot, too.

At last Daniels roused himself.

"Look here," he commenced dogmatically, "the only thing we can do is to bore that hole a bit deeper, and see what is the meaning of all this trouble. We must do it cautiously, for there may be gas, or some incandescent matter, down there, but that's all we've got to be afraid of. If we've struck a deposit of Hebrew, or a lot of Coptic roots," he added with withering scorn, "that doesn't matter. It's nothing alive, anyhow."

"Perhaps," said Venables in a terrified sort of tone, "perhaps it's something dead—or else something that can't die. Suppose we've struck Perdition."

"Dot might agcount for dot pell, now," mused Heller, but nobody else took any notice.

Daniels had the boring apparatus refixed in a wonderfully short time. Then the machine went round with a clanking noise, and we sat in the gloom and waited.

It was uncomfortable work. The minutes dragged slowly along, and we had nothing to do but loaf among the mud and the shadows, and listen. Daniels and his indefatigable lieutenant, Tanjia Topi, flitted around attending to the machinery, with two silent, spectral-looking Hindoos to assist them. Heller began to smoke, and looked on with a dull, ox-like expression on his round face. Raymond sat in a pool of water and never moved, but his teeth chattered tremendously. So did mine. Presently Venables began to chatter, too, and we made a chorus of it; in fact, he chattered so much that we left off and let him have the field all to himself. He was, without exception, the most terrified professor of dead languages who ever went underground. Finally he crawled over to me on his hands and knees and whispered.

"Don't you know what we've found?" he said in my ear. "That's Sheol down there. There isn't a shadow of doubt about it. That language I heard has been a dead language for 2000 years, and they've been speaking it in that place ever since. We've struck the department of ancient lost souls—that's what we've done. Daniels is prodding up the old kings of Egypt with that accursed drill, and next thing he'll strike a deposit of old Israelites—the ones that died in the wilderness, very likely. Can't you make him come away? I daren't go by myself."

I shook him violently in my sudden excitement.

"Look here, you lunatic," I cried, "there aren't any dead languages in that hole. It's all your



diseased imagination. We've struck a geyser or something—the Lord only knows what. And if it is the department of ancient lost souls, what then? You seemed quite happy about it when you heard your blessed Coptic root. What's gone wrong with you?"

"I didn't know what it meant then. I know now. For the Lord's sake let's get out of——"

Something happened to the drill just at that second, and Daniels was sent flying into the darkness, while Tanjia Topi landed right against the two assistants, and drove them madly against Venables, and the whole lot concussed heavily into Raymond, and fell—a struggling mass of capsized humanity. But Daniels and the Mohammedan were on their feet again in a moment. Also there was yet another howl from the borehole; but we had heard so many of them by this time that we stood our ground.

"We've holed through into some place," said Daniels. "Now then, haul up, and we'll find out the meaning of it all. Go ahead."

We gathered round in absolute fascination, and waited. There was a look of expectancy on every face, and the light overhead shone down on five ashen visages, and one—that belonging to Tanjia Topi—of greyish blue. And as we stood there the drill was drawn out, and attached to it was a freshly-severed tail!

It was covered with a horny incrustation, as if it had been jappanned, and at the end of it was a spike. The drill had severed it just at the root, and brought it away impaled on the point. Daniels made a snatch at it, but the same instant he dropped it with imprecations. It was worse than red-hot.

And as we listened, petrified and spell-bound, I heard a deep bass voice howling in a strange, uncouth language, apparently halfway up the borehole. The

words were foreign to me, but if the owner of the voice wasn't using the most embittered profanity ever heard on earth or elsewhere, I will never trust the evidence of my ears again.

"That's Syriac," said Venables, briefly, and then with a shriek of terror he galloped for the shaft.

We waited for the tenth part of an instant, and saw a head and face, which might have been human only for the indelible traces left by ages of fire and sin, come up out of the hole. And then, as the creature, who seemed partly man and partly boa-constrictor, got his hindquarters hitched somehow in the narrow orifice, and hung there, wriggling insanely to get out and shaking his black front claws at our heads, we fled for our lives.

\* \* \* \*

Tanjia Topi got away first in the race, but we overtook him and ran over him, and crippled him with our feet in our excessive haste. We found Venables ringing the bell like ten thousand lunatics, and two other Asiatics just leaping into the cage; but as there wasn't sufficient room for us all we threw them out. When we reached the next gallery our cries and our stampede for the other shaft alarmed the Hindoos on duty, and they also bolted madly for liberty. But again there was no room in the cage, and we threw them out. And then we tore at the bell till the telegraph apparatus was dragged into eight pieces and the machinery was set in motion, and we went up to the air and the blessed sunlight and left the mine for ever.

We never even sent down the cage for the heathens below. If we had, that Object might have come up, along with more of the same sort, and we dared not face the risk. There might be any number of them, and we had seen one, and that was enough.

The two engineers on top were a difficulty, but

within an hour of our exit we contrived to fill them with drugged liquor, and before they fully recovered we had got them away. By hard lying and lavish payment we drove them on board a tramp steamer bound for Valparaiso. Also those of us who had some senses left blew up the engine-house and made all the surface works a wreck.

Then we left behind us the ruins of the Great Experiment.



## After the Wreck.

Being the Pious Assertion of the Ancient  
Sailor Man.

**H**E was an ancient sailor with a dark, storm-beaten  
nose,  
And he had a tattered Scripture that was  
hidden in his clothes;  
On the blackened rocks he sat and told the story of  
his woes.

His mother gave the book to him in joyous days of old,  
And often he had read it by a slush-lamp in the hold,  
When the frozen gale was shrieking and the crested  
billows rolled.

And then, one day of gloom and wrack, the ship fell  
overboard,  
While in the wintry gloaming the frantic tempest  
roared,  
And the mast fell on the captain, and that officer was  
floored.

But this sailor seized his treasure and he started for  
the land;  
He reached it damp and naked, with the Bible in his  
hand,  
While the other men were eaten by the prawns along  
the strand.

He sailed again—the barque was loaded up with  
kerosene,  
And floating by some coral isles with hills of living  
green,  
The lightning struck it, and that vessel vanished from  
the scene.

The starboard watch was shrivelled up and perished  
in a heap.  
The evil-minded second mate was frizzled in his sleep,  
And the steward seized the anchor and vanished in the  
deep.

But this sailor-man arose, and o'er the blazing  
bulwarks he—  
With all his whiskers flaming and his hair on fire—  
did flee,  
And quenched his smouldering person in the silent,  
emerald sea.

For months he lived alone upon an archipelago,  
With his half-combusted property, and watched the  
seasons go,  
And the weary, glassy ocean in its ceaseless ebb and  
flow.

He listened to the moaning winds and heard the land-  
crab roar,  
And watched the winkle as it walked upon the ocean  
floor,  
Till he was picked up by a ship bound for Australia's  
shore.

The captain was a reprobate, and now and then he  
cussed,  
And sometimes, in his earlier days, he'd gone upon  
the "bust,"  
And the language of the crew would fill a good man  
with disgust.

So when the winds arose, and ghosts were shrieking  
on the blast,  
That sailor knew the voyage was the evil vessel's last,  
And he took his chattels in his teeth and hung on to  
the mast.

Next with a gruesome crash the noble vessel came to  
grief,  
And hung in fragments on the teeth of a most fearsome  
reef,  
And the sea was full of anchors, and jibbooms, and  
kegs of beef.

But sundry natives lit a mighty bonfire on the strand,  
And presently they saw an aged sailor come to land,  
And put a sodden volume down to dry upon the sand.

Then he sat himself beside it with a sad, abstracted  
look,  
And musingly he chased the welks from off the valued  
book  
Till it was dry—and then he picked it up, and took his  
hook.



# The Precipitous Details of the High Mountain and the Three Skeletons.

## I.

UP on an inaccessible shelf of rock in the New Zealand Alps may be seen a gathering of skeletons. At least they might be seen there if it were possible for anything unfurnished with wings to gain so much as a bird's eye glance at that crag that hangs midway between earth and heaven. But the precipitous wall bulges out above and obscures the view from overhead, even supposing there was any place overhead where a man or a goat could hang on for a second and consider things; and the same precipice swells out again beneath, and blocks the view from the pass below. The pass itself is narrow, and no one ever climbs the mountain on the other side of it, partly because no one ever comes that way; partly because there is nothing to be gained by climbing, for the whole peak would not sell for a cent in the open market, being merely good road-making material; partly because, if anyone should scale that pinnacle, it would only lead him to a razor-backed ridge, and the ridge itself leads nowhere; and chiefly because even the Prince of Darkness himself, hanging on with horns and claws and tail and all his other appurtenances and utensils, would find no footing there, and must needs let go and come down among the rocks and boulders underneath. Consequently the one spot which commands a view of the ledge and the skeletons is a spot which

no one will ever reach, and even if it could be reached no one would ever come back again from it to tell what he saw.

And the skeletons rest up there peaceful and untroubled, and the years drift by, and the seasons come and go. In rain and shine and thunder and wintry storm they sit and look out on the vast monotony of the Alps, and ponder on the silent, changeless majesty of the great unchangeable mountains. They look as if they themselves were wondering how they had reached their amazing elevation, for neither in front nor behind is there any possible pathway, and above and below there is nothing but bare, slippery, overhanging rock. They are wrecked among the clouds, and until Gabriel climbs up to look for their remains on the day of the general resurrection they will probably remain in their niche undisturbed.

They are planted in single file, for the shelf is long enough to accommodate them, but not wide enough to admit them comfortably two abreast. The man in front—or the dry and creaking wreckage of what was once a man—still sits on a tattered and rusted saddle. The next man in the line is lying on his back and the rain has drifted in at his jaws and his disused eye-holes, making a sort of high-tide within his fleshless skull. When there is a spell of dry weather he evaporates, and in wet seasons, on the other hand, he is in a state of perpetual overflow. It is evident this process has been going on for a good many years, for his head is nearly half-full of an alluvial deposit left by many succeeding storms. Otherwise there is nothing remarkable about him. The third member of the party is practically undistinguishable. All that can be seen of him is not even enough to found a reasonable tale upon. He was futile while he lived. He is hazy now that he lives no longer.

There are a few other properties almost too small

to be worth mentioning. A rusted billy-can, the fragments of a gun, and a half-mast rag that might once have been a blanket are about all.

For the rest, there is silence above and silence underneath. There is little light and much weird shadow in the narrow pass, and the sunlight only creeps in with difficulty, and the moon plays fantastic tricks thereabouts. And when there is neither sun nor moon, and the only light is the gleam of the icy stars, a new life and expression seem to awake in one at least of the three dead men, but it is only the radiance shining through the empty eye-holes of the individual whose head is half-full of water and silt, and reflected back at an acute angle through his half-open jaws. It gives a sort of semi-humorous cast to his countenance, but humor is wasted in a place where even a goat could not climb up to join in the mirth. Considering how little amusement there is in the earth it seems a wasted emotion that the dead man should laugh his unchanging laugh on the mountain with never an audience to bear him company.

## II.

There were three of us, and we had gone forth into the waste places of the Southern Alps to look for gold. We prospected among the rocks and cliffs, and on the bars of many a casual stream and up many an untrodden gorge, and everywhere we met ill-luck.

Jack Hamilton was the leader and guide and general support of the party. He was a weather-beaten, dusky individual of 40 or thereabouts, and his qualifications, apart from his experience as a miner, were a wide, far-reaching, complicated humour, and a power of misquoting Scripture which was never equalled before or since. Where he came from, or why he came from there, I never knew.

Percy, the next member of the company, was also remarkable, inasmuch as his other Christian name was Adolphus. He was a long, pale, silent youth, and a



conspicuous failure in every way that one man could fail without hiring outside assistance. He had been exported by his uncle, who was alleged to be a nobleman, and almost the only remark which he ever made by his own volition—except when he was roused to a sort of mild anger—was that he intended to write for money to take him home. Owing to the circumstances hereinafter mentioned, however, he never did write.

The third member of the party—myself—was noted for nothing at all except the conspicuous foolishness which led him to clamber with a pickaxe over a damp hillside on such an errand, and in such company, and hope to grow rich out of the venture.

And so when the summer began to wane, and the first breath of the chilling autumn was felt in the breezes that swept down from the Alps, we gathered up our camp and started for some newer and wilder regions than any we had yet visited.

### III.

“Boys,” said Hamilton emphatically, “it’s all very good for you to laugh, but I told you we’d find that mountain yet, and by the immortal there it is.”

The mountain alluded to was Jack Hamilton’s pet craze. He was filled with a tale concerning a certain wondrous peak which he had seen years before, and somehow lost again past all recovery. There was a deposit of gold there—great masses of gold—and for some elaborate reason he had brought none of it away with him on the memorable occasion when Providence threw the treasure at his head, in a manner of speaking, and he had neglected to pick it up. His story varied a good deal, and the mountain grew higher each time we heard of it, and the gold more abundant; but as far as I could make out the original circumstances were something like these. Jack Hamilton was a newly imported stranger at one time—an unsophisticated lamb digging promiscuously in the most unlikely places, and vainly plunging around with

a spade and a pickaxe upon the face of Nature. He found nothing in particular at this period of his life, not even himself sometimes, for being fresh and new and harmless he was often unable to turn a corner and find his way home again afterwards. And in consequence of this failing he lost himself badly on one occasion, and wandered away among the boundless ranges, and there led a precarious existence upon substances never clearly specified. By the most vigorous and ceaseless walking, and by rushing over every obstacle that came in his way, assisted by the fact that he had taken the wrong direction at first, and had succeeded—though steering by the sun—in keeping wrong ever afterwards, he contrived at last to be discovered, delirious and almost dead, in quite a new part of the country. The Samaritans who picked him up conveyed him many miles to an hospital, and left him there without stating where they had met him. And in consequence of all this, when Hamilton woke up at last, and remembered about the mountain and the gold which he had seen or dreamt of in his wanderings, there was no geographical information to go upon.

He had grown middle-aged since then, and had made and lost small fortunes in the gold industry, but he had never found the lost peak and the lost millions. When our prospecting expedition began to grow weary and unprofitable, he let Percy and me into the great secret, and we also grew enthusiastic for a while, but we had seen not a trace of the place either. Yet, according to Jack's description, it was the sort of mountain that nobody could pass unnoticed. It was square and vertical, and on three sides absolutely inaccessible, while the top seemed to be sawn off as if some one had removed the original summit. And, most surprising thing of all, there was on the fourth side a gently-sloping road—it had probably been a precipitous path in the first place, but it had been improving in Jack's brain for years, until he was



almost prepared to swear that there was an iron gate with a knocker, and a hotel with choice refreshments, and that ham and eggs grew wild on the mountain side, while the ice-cream blossomed on the trees. And about half way up this track was Jack's gold mine—a species of cave with all Golconda lying about loose inside.

We had long since lost faith in the mine—Percy and I. We believed in it at first, when Hamilton laid it before us one day as a bald, unvarnished statement; but the next day he wandered into details about the riches it contained, and we grew dubious; and the day after that he threw in so many surprising facts about the scenery that we became sceptical. A little later he told us in a solemn tone about the road, and gravely propounded the theory that his mine was the original mine of Solomon, and that the way which led up to it was the work of some Israelitish engineer, and then we set him down as a bad description of lunatic, and prayed that we might escape him, and get back safely to civilisation. But unluckily we were lost among the mountains, and the experienced maniac was our sole hope and reliance if we were to find our way back.

And now, when we were weary of the whole enterprise, and would gladly have shunted our guide into an asylum and sold our share of all the prospective millions for a song, the mountain of gold was looming up before us. A moment before we would as soon have expected to see the Himalayas in front of us, or the peaks of Lebanon. Then the mist opened, and straight ahead was a great square mass of rock, with the summit sawn off as if the upper peak had been cut away and thrown into the depths beneath.

We were toiling along through an enormous cleft in the hills, when this vision burst upon us, and on each side of us the cliffs rose like walls and blotted out the sunlight. There was a little stream, or rather a little noisy river, meandering through this pass,



and we scrambled painfully amid the shingle which lined it on either side. When we came to a patch of comparatively easy travelling we mounted our packhorses, for there was now so exceedingly little to carry that they were packhorses only in name; and when the track was difficult—which was usually the case—we dragged the animals after us. As it chanced we were all three in our saddles when Jack's great discovery rose on the horizon, and instinctively we pulled up and sat glaring into futurity.

Then Hamilton gave a shout that made the rocks ring and re-echo, and kicking his bony black horse into a furious scramble, he tore away and left us.

Then I said nothing, for I was too full of bewilderment for words, but I pounded furiously on the ribs of my dejected steed like a man who flogs a nightmare in a dream, and rushed after him.

And finally Percy gathered up his scattered faculties and followed us, and as he followed he threw out an exclamation into the air.

“By Jove!”

#### IV.

Yes, the legendary mountain was there in all reality. And, more wondrous still, the road was there too, winding in a curious zig-zag fashion away up in the misty atmosphere. And as to the gold, we never doubted it now—not even for a moment.

It wasn't much of a road after all, but it was enough for our purpose. It was cut in the face of the cliff and it afforded abundant room for one horseman, but very little for two. It had once been smooth and exceedingly regular, but rain and frost and lightning had dented it, and rotted away the edges, and filled it with cracks and slippery places, and here and there it seemed to have been repaired very long ago by some rough and ready artist in masonry, and his handiwork was now falling into pieces. But it was a road, and Jack Hamilton's dream was coming true after all.

“I knew it,” he yelled. “I knew I would find

it. It's all there—thousands—millions—hundreds of millions—it's been waiting for us all these years, and now we're the richest men on earth. We are—we——”

“Yah—ha—aha—yaha!”

It was a long-drawn, musical cry that came from some great way overhead, and apparently a dozen pairs of human lungs were combined in the chorus. And it was so sudden and wild and unexpected that Percy turned his horse's head there and then, and fled for a quarter of a mile down the pass.

“What in all the universe is that?”

Then we both sat and listened, and as we did so the same cry rose again, and swelled and rolled with a solemn reverberation through the air, and awoke long echoes among the gnarled old Alps.

“Yah—ha—aha—yaha.”

“By the Immortal, we're too late! Our claim's jumped!”

All the joy and energy went out of us in an instant. Hamilton turned an ashy grey, and wiped great beads of perspiration off his forehead. I climbed slowly out of my saddle and sat down helplessly on a boulder. It seemed as if I had actually owned uncounted gold only a moment ago, and now it had dissolved and fled away into absolute nothingness, and all that remained of that wealth was an old, battered, grey horse, some ancient blankets, certain provisions, and a billy-can.

“Let's go on anyhow,” suggested Hamilton. “We may as well see what's happened. But if there's anybody up there they must have found the claim long ago. Nobody but a corpse could miss it, and a pretty cold corpse at that. O Lord, the gold's just staring you in the face—heaps of it—piles of it. Well, we may as well look at it anyhow, even if we don't get a cent. But, after all,” and here he brightened up visibly, “there may be only three or four fellows altogether, and if that's so we'll get a share or there'll

be a row—such a row there will be. Come on; we'll thin out these pioneers a bit if we've any luck."

"We haven't any luck, Jack," I answered. "That's just where it is."

Then we started up the hill in a dejected procession. Percy came back cautiously, and tailed on to the rear of the caravan, but he was obviously scared and uneasy, and his ears seemed to stand up more conspicuously than usual on each side of his head as he listened. Furthermore, he sniffed the air in all directions. But there was no repetition of that wild, pathetic wail that had come apparently from the clouds, and, stranger still, there was not a footprint to be seen anywhere, nor a single thread of smoke against the sky, nor was there the echo of a pick stroke to be heard. The old stillness of the Alps had settled down once more on all our surroundings. The ancient highway seemed to be crumbling to pieces beneath our horses' hoofs, and even when we came at last to a yawning gap which we crossed with difficulty and considerable danger, there were no signs of any recent attempt at repair or improvement. When Hamilton saw this he drew a sigh of relief.

"Boys," he said solemnly, "I believe it's all right after all. If anyone was working the claim he must have left some signs, and there hasn't been a foot or a hoof on this road for years. And as to these voices it doesn't matter where they are so long as they aren't here. Well, I'm d——d, some more!"

Right above our heads came a long, shrill blast like a conch or a tuneless horn—a blast so shrill and so long-sustained that I thought any human lungs must have burst under the effort.

"There's one man about anyhow," I said; "but where is he? He must be a mile up in the air from the sound he makes."

"He isn't a white man—that I'll swear," said Hamilton. "Did you ever hear such a note as that?"



"He isn't a Maori, either. There aren't any about these parts."

"Well, I don't care. We're going straight on. We haven't got so far as this to be scared by any fool with a brass trumpet. Inside an hour we'll reach the mine, and then we'll find out the meaning of this circus. Mind where you're going now," he added, for a piece of the rock suddenly crumbled away in front of us and went thundering down the mountain side, leaving another awkward chasm to be leaped over.

"The mine's just about half-way up," said Hamilton thoughtfully, after another long pause. "Now this festive orchestra seems to be holding its performance right on the top, and that's what I can't understand, for, so far as I know, the road ends just beyond the cave. All that's left after that is a dead wall like the side of a house, and there's no place where a goat could get any further. And I don't believe there's another track up the hill anywhere—I'm dead sure there isn't—I'd bet my life on it. Well, then, how did that party get up there with his trombone, if he is up there, and if he isn't there—where is he?"

"You didn't hear anything when you went here before, I suppose?" asked Percy nervously.

"Great Scott! Do you suppose somebody's been up there for fifteen years playing his music and camping out for the fun of the thing?"

"No—o,' I don't mean that. But how would it be if they can't get down."

"Then how on earth did they get up?" I asked. "And supposing they did get up and yet can't get down again by the same track, how do you think anybody lives up there? Do you suppose they plant potatoes and grow oats and rear families up among the clouds?"

"Perhaps they've been up there always."

"Always! Been born up there you mean, and never came down, and can't find a way out of it."

Percy, I've known a good many fools, but for a plain unmitigated ass you beat any ass I ever heard of."

I stopped then, for there was a roaring, clattering sound, and a perfect avalanche of stones came down over our heads. They flew past us so closely that I could feel a rush of cold air on my face, and one immense boulder struck a projecting knob above us and broke into a thousand splinters like a bomb-shell when it bursts.

"I say, for God's sake let's get out of this!" shrieked Percy as he turned a ghastly white.

"Lie down, you idiot," yelled Hamilton. And suiting the action to the word he dismounted and doubled himself into an amazingly small compass and squeezed himself flat against the cliff: "Lie down, and hold on!"

We were down in the smallest fraction of a second. Above us there was a rending, humming noise, as if some stupendous object was tearing its way through a mass of vegetation. Then there was a concussion that made the ancient rocks shake and quiver, and an immense tree flew out almost horizontally above our heads and disappeared into the great empty depths below.

And behind it came——

It was a man, spinning through the air. He was brown-skinned and naked, and his long hair flew out behind and all around him. He came and passed like a flash, but I saw him turn over and over as he went—now doubled up—now spread out as if grasping at space for some support, and then he landed right in the centre of the little brawling river that foamed along underneath our feet, and was seen no more. But doubtless the river clutched the unrecognisable fragments of him with its arms of foam, and rolled them over and over, and cast them up, and sucked them in again, and churned them round and round in its angry whirlpools, and tore them against stones and snags and jagged rocks. And at last when it was

tired of this play it bore away the scattered remains of the wild man of the mountains, and swept them out into the far Pacific, where the long, black locks of his hair rose and fell like seaweed with the ceaseless rythm of the unrestful waters, and the shrimps and the prawns came to see him, and the crabs and the lobsters wrestled for the debris of the feast, and the patient barnacles walked over his battered bones as they lay on the floor of the great ocean.

And then far, far above our heads came that same mournful chorus.

“Yah-ha-aha-yaha!”

## V.

When the naked visitant from the upper air had passed and vanished, I deliberately lay down on the pathway and clutched the rock with both hands to keep myself steady, for earth and sky and mountains seemed to be all dancing a frenzied jig around me. Percy lay behind me, almost insensible from terror. And as for Hamilton, he craned his neck outwards and upwards to see if any new dangers were threatening, and seeing none he finally sat up and laughed hysterically with chattering teeth, and passed his hands through his hair.

“I think we must have disturbed a whole city-full of niggers,” he said. “There’s the rest of the menagerie raising the same old hymn. What a chorus!”

He spoke in a strange, jerky fashion, and seemed to grope for each word before he uttered it, as if he were looking for it in the pages of a dictionary, and was uncertain about the pronunciation even when he found it.

“Th—th—that was—shave,” I gasped; “——close shave—I mean. I suppose that—tree was meant—for—for us, wasn’t it?”

“I should think it was. And the bricks, and the rest of the furniture as well.”



“ For heaven’s sake, let’s make a run for it, then, and get out of this,” implored Percy, huskily. “ It’s certain death to stay here.”

“ We can’t go back in daylight, my boy, if that’s what you mean. We couldn’t get to the bottom again in less than an hour, and that gang of alien dynamiters’ll shoot trees at us all the way. We’ll run for the cave and lie there till dark, and then we must bolt and—and leave all the gold behind us,” he added regretfully. “ No, I’ll see that tribe hanged twenty thousand times over before I’ll do that. I’ll come back and blast every one of them off his perch with nitro-glycerine first. I’ll float a company, and we’ll turn the whole mountain upside-down and shake them off the top of it into the river. There’s another rock coming down I expect—come on—we’ve got to run for it, and no mistake.”

And we ran. The horses had stampeded long ago, but we travelled faster than any horse could have carried us over such ground. It was about 200 yards, and we covered it in a few seconds, though it seemed to take whole ages. There were awkward turns and angles in the road, and as we shot round each one I expected to find a crowd of strange-looking aborigines rushing at us, but no single human being appeared in sight. The wailing chorus had died away; there were no more missiles booming down the mountain side; there was nothing, in fact, but a profound stillness—the Sabbath calm of long, long centuries. Yet above our heads somewhere a heathen tribe was pervading the mountain top, and getting ready some new project for our destruction. Then suddenly we came on a strange sight—a solitary tree growing out of this world of stone, and a tiny stream of fresh water that trickled out of the rock, and beside them was the cave where the glory of Pactolus lay hidden waiting to make us rich past all comprehension.

It was a little depression in the rock—only that and nothing more. Its walls were bare and hungry

stone. There was no sign of gold—there had never been any—there never would be any. It was all emptiness and fraud and hollow delusion and ruin unutterable. I could have made as good a gold-mine any day in the middle of a pavement. I could have made a better one in an old dry well. It was the only part of Hamilton's dream that had no foundation—the mountain and all the other surroundings were there, but the gold was a delusion and a delirium. And just as we gained the scanty shelter of the cave the air was filled with an ear-splitting yell of malice, and a huge mass—ten tons or more of solid rock—came down the mountain side.

It was the first really good shot they had made. Ten yards behind us it struck the crumbling pathway, and the rock split and rent asunder as if it had been a wall of earth built up against the hillside. And when it was gone we were wrecked up in the air—stranded among the clouds, with nothing—absolutely nothing—remaining but the ledge on which we stood, and the wall of rock behind us, and the abyss in front and on either side.

## VI.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when we caught our first glimpse of the golden mountain, and by noon the gold had vanished and the great vision faded, and everything was over.

The night came and found us still sitting there, and indulging in dreary speculations.

"It was hundreds of years, I suppose, since this road was made—or thousands perhaps," said Hamilton. "The upper part of it must have fallen in somehow, and that tribe of fiends has been wrecked at the top and lived there ever since. Just think of it. Likely enough their ancestors were there when St. Paul was on the earth. Perhaps they were there in Abraham's time, or before the Deluge. There may be some of the patriarchs among them, or some of the

giants that were left over from Noah's day. And I suppose they've lived and married and grown old and died on the top of this accursed mountain, and they've raised vegetables up there, and caught birds, and lived on in just the same savagery as their fathers did at the beginning of the world."

He was in the first stages of fever. His hands were burning and his eyes glassy and his cheeks flushed, and he talked on with a wild, incessant volubility that was maddening to listen to.

"And all this time perhaps they've been picking and gnawing the mountain away, for the only way to get down is to cut away the rock under their feet. And when they've grubbed the entire peak to pieces, and worked down to the level ground, they'll come out into the world—their remote descendants will, that is—and what a world it'll be for them. I suppose this was the highest peak in New Zealand once, and they've torn it up bit by bit with their hands till they've worked down—down——"

"Jack," I said, "for goodness' sake be rational. How are we to get out of this? Never mind about all the rest."

"I suppose we're the first strangers they've seen for ages, and it's the nature of the animal, when he sees a stranger, to throw something at him. And that cheerful old father that came through the air so suddenly, all scattered and spread out, and with his hair flying behind him—he must have been lifting for all he was worth to start the tree over on our heads, and he was too near the edge, I expect, and when the thing went a little faster than he expected, he went after it. What a surprised-looking person he was as he went past," and Jack laughed at the recollection. "I wonder who he was? Some of these old prophets in the Bible seemed as if they never would die. Perhaps he was one of them. I suppose a patriarch would last a long time in a healthy atmosphere like that? Maybe he was Genesis."



"Jack, stop that talk, for heaven's sake. We must find a way out of this."

"Out of this? Why, there isn't any way. We can jump down, of course—the same track that the naked father took this morning. There isn't any other road now. What a smash that rock made. If they'd blasted the path away with dynamite they couldn't have done it better. I wonder if we could get up, seeing we can't get down, and then we might join the naked clan on the top, and marry some plain native female apiece—ha, ha—and bring up families and—oh, what a joke, ha, ha—ha, ha!"

He gave a yell of laughter, and crawled out along the ledge though we had inspected it a dozen times already. But in a second or two he turned back again.

"There's nothing there but the beginning of universal emptiness—only fresh air and a cliff that a fly couldn't climb. No, this is the finish—the whole game ends right here—a wall of rock above us, and below us, and on each side of us, and here we are sitting on our shelf with our feet hanging over, and there's no gold after all—I must have dreamt it, I suppose, or——"

"Jack, there's always a chance that some one may pass along away down there—a prospector or something of that sort. If we were to call for help somebody might hear us, and——"

"Nobody'll come this way till next century now. And what difference would it make, anyhow? It would take half-a-mile of ladder to do us any good, or else a balloon. They couldn't shoot meat at us with a gun, or fire jugs of water at us, you know, or anything like that. It's all up, I tell you—oh, I wish the duke there would stop groaning. He makes me ill."

Percy was lying at the furthest extremity of the ledge, a mere huddled-up mass of clothes and misery and blank, despairing wretchedness. Poor Percy.

One of these days, when his lordly uncle has dropped gently into the family mausoleum, and left the mortgages and the pedigree and the hereditary spoons behind him, somebody will go looking for the heir to all these properties, and no one will dream that he is lost among the kites and crows away up in the Southern Alps.

By-and-by the moon rose and made curious shadows among the gaunt crags and peaks, and we tailed off into dejected silence, and sat looking out solemnly on the magnificence of the great snow-topped mountains. And then, after awhile, I somehow fell into a horrible sleep and dreamed.

I woke again with a start——

\* \* \* \* \*

Extract from the "Inangahua Times," 4th January, 1891:—

"A man, name unknown, was brought up at the police-court yesterday, charged with being a lunatic at large. He made an incoherent statement to the effect that he had taken to vagrancy owing to his skeleton, and the remains of two other men, being on the top of an inaccessible mountain, and not able to get down, and he asked the court if it had a ladder half-a-mile long. The arresting constable reported that he had searched the prisoner, and found in his pockets two buttons, a piece of rock weighing three pounds, and an almost illegible manuscript in an unfinished condition. The case was remanded for a week."

## The Wrongs of the Girl in the Turkish Bath.

IT was a slack time at the Turkish bath. The place was reserved at that hour for ladies, and the ladies were fewer than usual, and the accountant was pensively eating the top of her pencil and thinking of nothing at all. By-and-bye she began to grow drowsy, and in another minute she might have fallen asleep, only a shadow passed unexpectedly between her and the sunlight, and she sat up again. It was a large shadow, and was cast by a big, sunburnt young female who was nervously standing off and on in the doorway and showing signals of distress. Apparently she wanted to come in, and, at the same time, she wanted to stay out, and by way of striking an average between these two emotions, she was coming in sideways, and instead of coming in a straight line she was rubbing herself along the wall. Her age was probably about eighteen, and she was evidently fresh from the bush. When she had traversed most of the corridor she concussed against an umbrella stand, and would have fallen over it and landed in great disorder on the floor but the accountant rushed out and caught her, and then she acknowledged nervously and apologetically that she had come to try a Turkish bath and see what it was like.

She seemed so scared by her own rashness that the accountant took pity on her, and told her that her resolution was in every way commendable. Then she led the patient up to the office, and waited for her to pay the accustomed contribution. But the



sufferer plainly had no idea of what was expected of her, and tacked back and forward in front of the pigeon-hole, and started to supply a brief resume of her history, together with a quantity of interesting information concerning her parents, and various details regarding outside branches of the family. As she went on it gradually dawned on the surprised listener that the visitor was endeavoring to explain away the suspicious circumstance of her wanting a Turkish bath—wanted to show, in fact, that the bath was forced upon her by circumstances which were too strong to be resisted—that her whole life had led up to that Turkish bath, and any reflections which the bath might leave upon her character were, therefore, wholly undeserved. Then she interrupted:

“It'll be three shillings, please.”

“—kem out from Hingland when eleven years of age,” pursued the customer, in an agony of nervousness, “along with the rest of the family, one of them havin' died, and lived in the country ever since, down Gippsland way, in a quiet, though respectable, locality——”

“If you'll kindly go along with the attendant, she'll show you the way.”

The attendant, in fact, was grasping the new customer from behind, and endeavoring to conduct her along the passage, but she was hard to move. She was heavy, for one thing, and she was so deeply involved in her efforts to clear her character that she was quite unconscious that anybody was shoving her. But at last she got into sudden motion, and was led into the saloon, and almost to the door of one of the little apartments where the victim is supposed to leave her every-day attire. Then she somehow backed the distracted official against the wall, and overwhelmed her with an observation that lasted nearly a quarter of an hour, and covered her with a waste of battered grammar and left-off syntax, and old disused pronunciation. At the end of that time her auditor

managed to shove her into a room containing a looking-glass, a chair, and a bathing costume, and left her there. After that, she went out and laughed in the passage until she was exhausted, and another woman had to take her place for a time.

About three hours afterwards the lady in the office dropped in to make some inquiries, and by comparing notes with the new attendant it was discovered that a customer had got lost somewhere on the premises. There was a hurried investigation, and the strayed individual was found sitting down in Box No. 10. She was in an exhausted state from want of provisions, but was sticking manfully to her post. The leader of the search party went back to the office, and gave way to unbridled mirth, but the principal washer and drier rose to the occasion. She had once been the fighting warder of a female lunatic asylum, and concluding that the visitor was a convalescent who had been ordered a Turkish bath for the good of her intelligence, and had mislaid her attendant, she proceeded to undress her by force, and induct her into the bathing costume. Then she went out in quest of a towel or something, and on her return she found the door locked, and when she hailed the customer through the keyhole, and explained that she was expected to come out in her scanty attire, that inmate braced herself firmly against the portal and shouted "Thieves." Two ladies, attired in a long white sheet apiece, who were "cooling off" after going through the customary process, dropped their hot coffee over each other in terror at this sudden outbreak.

There was a hurried consultation of the entire establishment, and then another attendant—one of those whose business it was to soap the visitors and throw the hot water over them—came and negotiated through the keyhole. The lady within was still holding the door with all her might, and she had her head braced against it, and her feet against the wall. She



wanted to have her Turkish bath inside, all by herself, and stated she was born of poor but respectable parents. Being told that the proposed arrangement was impossible, she refused to emerge on any terms, and cast such reflections upon the soap and hot water woman that the latter climbed up on a chair, with a view to dragging the bather forth over the top of the partition. She came down again hurriedly, and went away to put some cooling substance on her eye, and there was a long pause. Just here a motherly old lady, who had been having a course of treatment to cure her rheumatism, borrowed a kitchen table, and mounting it with difficulty, proceeded to look over the partition and remonstrate with the erring fellow-creature on the other side. The messenger of peace wore a large towel and a pair of spectacles, and she had her hair cut short, which possibly created a misconception, for when the distracted girl saw her head appear she gave way to fresh excitement, and called out "Fire!"

But the tumult calmed down after this, and oil was presently thrown upon the troubled customer. The old lady pointed out that it was impossible to pass a tub of water and some soap over the partition, and that a bath, taken under such circumstances, was cold and uncomfortable, and, moreover, it wasn't a Turkish bath at all. Then she assured the inmate that ladies of the highest respectability did come out with nothing but a bathing costume; and finally she gained the confidence of her auditor, and induced her to explain the situation.

It appeared she had been reading a cheap romance with the beginning torn out, and in the remains of this work it had transpired that the heroine—whose name was Gwendoline—had a Turkish bath on one occasion, and this fact had led the girl from the country to rush into her present alarming situation. Then she broke down, and stated that the only thing she wanted now was to get her clothes on and go home



to her mother, but she couldn't get her clothes on because she was holding the door with both hands, and if she let go the door she was afraid people would rush in, and carry her away to be washed in some outlandish fashion that might prove fatal. She added that she had been sitting there on the chair for eight hours, and hanging on to the door-handle for a period that seemed endless, and that a strange woman had burst in and torn most of her clothes off, and wrapped a sheet round her, and she wished she was dead.

By this time the attendant with the damaged eye had come back with an axe, and was hanging round in the hope that she might have a chance to break in the door and haul out her assailant by compulsion. But she retired abashed with her weapon hidden behind her, when she saw the door open of its own accord, and the old lady scramble off the table, and go in, and embrace the rampant patient. And she was still more surprised when the patient returned the embrace, and buried her head in her friend's capacious bosom, and stated tearfully that she was hungry. And finally, the motherly peacemaker undertook to go and have portion of another bath, merely in order that she might see the stranger safely through the ordeal, and the latter consented to this arrangement. Then the old lady, in her towel and blue spectacles, and with a kindly smile on her countenance, stalked proudly into the hot room, and her tame captive trotted after her, undressed and in her right mind.

Still, the guardian angel came very near to anger when she turned round and found that her follower was carrying all her clothes along with her. She had her boots slung round her neck, and a hat and a stocking in one hand, and the second stocking and a whole assortment of miscellaneous articles in the other. And when she was urgently requested to leave her clothes in the dressing-room, she responded with the unanswerable conundrum: "Supposin' they was to be took?"

"But they won't be taken, my child. Nobody will touch them."

"But if they was to be took, I couldn't get home like this."

This was undeniable, but the old lady settled the matter by taking firm hold of the whole consignment of clothes, and carrying them away to Box No. 10. When she opened the door of the hot room in coming back she concussed it heavily against the head of her protege, who was following her movements through the keyhole. That miserable sufferer had been seized with an instantaneous conviction that her supposed friend had absconded with the wearing apparel, and that she was left behind—a girl in a bathing costume, adrift on the hard surface of a strange land. She was beginning to puff heavily in the heated atmosphere, but still she looked unspeakably relieved when she found that her suspicions were baseless. She endured in silence for about five minutes, and at the end of that period she began to pray for air. Her guardian led her to the fountain, and told her to stoop down.

She stooped.

Then the old lady emptied about a quart of cool water over her head, and asked her if she felt better.

The girl returned with surprising suddenness to an erect position and answered with a glare. She made no reply in words, but her eye expressed the indignation of one who had lost faith in the human race. It said, as plainly as a whole dictionary could do, that she had trusted this perfidious old woman, and the old woman had betrayed her, and surreptitiously thrown cold water on her head. It stated, as distinctly as language could state, that all was over between them. It was the sort of look that Caesar might have worn if he had found himself unexpectedly washed by Brutus in the Forum—the look that Cato might have assumed if the whole Roman Republic had been treacherously shampooed by an enemy in his absence. Then she solemnly walked back to the

dressing-room, and proceeded with all possible haste to get into her clothes, and fly from the scene.

And when the old lady, in a spirit of Christian forbearance, appealed to her through the crack to come out with her and have some refreshment, she banged indignantly on the other side of the door with her boots, but other response there was none. The proud spirit of the daughter of the wilderness was wounded beyond repair.



## The Autobiography of a Cannibal.

I AM quite sane as I write this autobiography—quite sane, and my pulse is calm enough to satisfy any doctor as to my mental condition. I am going to be hanged next week—hanged by the neck till my body is dead, as the judge put it but then judges are so fond of unnecessary detail. And till then I have this cell all to myself—a nice, cool, damp place with a high window, and thick iron bars to keep people who are in from breaking out, or perhaps to keep people who are out from breaking in—but, no, I suppose it can't be that. Who wants to be in here, with the shadows and the spiders, and, worse still, the chaplain—that man of platitudes who talks, TALKS, TALKS, to me about my soul, and flounders for my benefit through the great African desert of a creed that he doesn't comprehend—and the loneliness and the darkness, and all the rest of the etceteras which go to make up existence in the condemned cell? No, I don't think any one wants to break in here. If I were free and rich, and were anxious to find a safe resting-place for the family jewels, and the heirlooms, and the plate, and the other adjuncts of respectability, I think I would hire this same cell and store the goods away in its shady corners, and rest quite content as to their safety—provided, of course, the chaplain could be trusted, of which, by-the-way, I am not quite sure. He is such a shifty-looking individual, with a loose mouth, and a far-away eye, and he has pants

that are too short for him, and a gallows expression, if I may be excused for talking shop at this solemn moment, and he never looks anybody in the face. But, after all, I will be done with him next week, and he matters very little to me now. Only I would like to tread on him just once before I die. I weigh 16 stone, and if I only had him down on this stone floor I would call him my "dear brother," as he has called me so often, and I would step on his chest with the whole of my massive two hundredweight of manhood, and then I would tell them to get a new chaplain to attend to the soul of their next condemned prisoner, as the old one had burst. I think I'll do it. The world can spare that chaplain.

But I have gay times in this dark cell, in spite of the chaplain, and at night, when a parsimonious Government has partially turned off the gas-jet, I sing merry tunes that arouse the watching warders and startle the ghosts of the old convicts who preceded me here, and arouse the anger of the man in the next apartment—a miserable wretch with a barrel-organ soul, who is in here for life, and who seems to regard it as a personal injury that I spend my last hours over comic opera for his amusement. But I expect even he would sing if he were in my position, always supposing fellows of his stamp have any sense of humor, which I doubt. For, after all, it is the other man who is to be hanged—the man I killed. He is to be hanged for killing me, and I have left an unstained record behind me and am deeply regretted by all who knew me. It is the other man whom the chaplain shuffles in to exhort every day. And, as for me, the pathos of the funeral sermon that was preached above my dust was something worth remembering, and the congregation was moved to tears, and gave largely to the collection. It is the man whom I wiped out who is spending his last hours in this dull, damp retreat amid the spiders and the shadows, and next week he will be strung up between earth and heaven,

and I suppose neither place will see him any more. The comedy will be at an end, and nobody will ever know the secret of it. I wonder, sometimes, if anybody could sort us out. There are times when I get entangled in the mystery myself, and loose the run of my own identity. I am here in some sense or other, but I am not the individual I was. He is here, too. I killed him, and yet he is here, and next week he is to be hanged, and so he will die twice over, and his second death will be worse than the first. And then we will lie together in one grave, and play the part of a ghostly Sianese twin, and through the cycles of the everlasting future I will be mated with a clown in a sense that the poet never dreamt of. But the gaolers don't see it, nor the judge, nor that dull dog of a lawyer who defended me, and if I told them they would never understand, so I will enjoy the secret all by myself. Yet I would almost like to have that sombre old judge here for an hour. He has a certain amount of brains, though they are of the cart-horse description, and I would like him to exercise his judicial intellect on a question that I am always trying to solve, and always without success. I want to ask him where I am. I want to explain to that law-befuddled old soul that it is the other man who is shut up in this condemned cell while they are putting up the gallows outside; that the man who is dead is alive again; that the man I killed is here waiting to be killed over again; and amid all this confusion I want to know where am I? Nowhere, apparently. I think when I get into the Shadow Land I will send out a ghostly expedition to seek for myself—to find out how I have been jostled out of existence, and why I have become so utterly unfixable. I wonder if there ever was another man who, like myself, was absolutely nowhere, who had neither body nor soul nor existence of any sort? I don't think so.

Let me try if I can figure out the problem. To begin with, we had been friends since childhood. If



you want to know what "friend" means you needn't look in the dictionary; I am better than any dictionary when a question like that is on the tapis. A friend is someone whom, as a matter of custom or interest or something else, you pretend to love and admire and sacrifice yourself to, but whom all the while you hate with the hatred of a whole terrace of devils. He is a man who presumes upon your good nature to do and say things that no one else would even dream of, and whom you vow to repay some day for his friendship when you can plan out a vengeance sufficient to express your feelings. He is a self-satisfied fool who takes your time and your money and steals from you the woman you love, and never for a moment imagines that you long to tear him limb from limb as his just reward. That is the meaning of the word "friend." If you want to describe him by a symbol, the hyena is the best I can suggest. I once met that animal, and I longed to shake him cordially by the tail as a sign of amity. Well, to repeat it, we were friends, and he lived up to the character. He married the woman who would otherwise have married me; he went into politics, and became famous; he rose steadily and constantly, and began to look down on me, while I grew rich, yet remained a nobody. And, unluckily, I grew impatient. If I had worked and watched and waited I might, perhaps, have dragged him slowly down and left him to die in the gutter; but I was tired of him, and a sudden temptation was placed in my way. I owned a lonely house on the sea-coast which I never occupied, and one day the fancy took him to go and look at it. Nobody knew we were there; nobody was near to disturb us; and while the fool was telling me how I ought to get the old mansion repaired, and turn it into a summer residence, I brought an axe down on his head, and finished him. He was uttering some ponderous jest when I did it, but he never came to the end of it. A sudden desire to have a joke on

my own account hurried me on, and his witticism was cut short.

I suppose you never had a remains on your hands that you didn't know how to dispose of. If you have gone through that experience, you will understand what an awkward thing is the dead body of a friend. In the first place, it is so long that you can't get it into lots of convenient hiding-places which would otherwise just meet the case. And then, when you have found a suitable spot in which to bestow it, it is awkward to remove. If you are strong enough to carry it under your arm, it doubles up, and the head knocks against your legs, and if you drag it along it leaves a trail that may betray you any time. And even if you bury it it is always coming to the surface again, and if you throw it into the sea it is a hundred chances to one that it is washed up, and if you live by the seashore it will float twenty miles for the satisfaction of reaching land opposite your door. I reckoned up all these dangers and felt that I must devise something new. And then I struck upon a brilliant scheme which I carried out to the letter. I ate him. I evaporated sea-water in the boiler in the big, empty kitchen, and thus got the means to salt him, and then I lived on him for the next fortnight till he was all gone. I hunted up an old gridiron and a saucepan and cooked him in all sorts of ways, but he was best when I fried him with onions. Roasted he was insipid, and he made the worst stew I ever tasted, but grilled he was not at all bad. I got tired of him at last, but I kept looking forward to the time when he would be finished, and then I would go back to civilisation and enjoy a club dinner once more, and that kept me up. I burnt his bones even, and then I pounded them into dust, and when all was over he had vanished from the earth as completely as if he had never been. I burnt his clothes, too, and threw the dust into the sea, and I pitched the gridiron and the



saucepan over the cliffs, and there the matter ended, and I was done with him.

There was a tremendous hue-and-ery after the missing man, and I was indefatigable in conducting the search for his remains. Perhaps this may seem like hypocrisy on my part, but I don't think anything could have been more natural or more reasonable. In the first place he was the individual above all others who was interested in the search, and I was he, so far as he could be said to exist at all. Next to him I myself was the person most deeply involved, and thus I represented both parties at once, and tried to do my best on both sides of the question. But this sort of dual existence, though amusing enough at first, ultimately grew wearisome, and, after a while, a change came over me that I had never reckoned upon. My double personality began to come to the surface. I was the dead man as well as the living one, and even in death he was the stronger of the two. Gradually my features assumed the cast that his had worn, and I found myself speaking with his voice and thinking with his thoughts, until at last I seemed to become him in every sense, and, standing outside myself, I raged against my own perfidy, and called down vengeance on my own head. And, as this change crept over me, the whole crowd of imbeciles who made up my circle of acquaintances began to regard me with horror as some new species of madman, and obtrusive detectives commenced to haunt me with a vague idea that the key of the mystery was somehow in my keeping, and medical vampires refused to be shaken off, and hung round me at every turn, till life became a horror. I was two different men by turns, and these two hated each other with a great hatred. At last I became so entirely him that they arrested him for killing me. And I confessed that he had killed and eaten me. But I am all myself now, and I can laugh gaily in my condemned cell as I recollect that it was he who was tried and sentenced, and whose name will



be remembered with scorn and loathing as long as his memory shall endure. I wear his outward form yet; I wear it in the gaol, and I will wear it on the gallows. His wife comes to see me at times, and when she kneels at my feet I wish I could raise his ghost to look at her, and enjoy the spectacle. I struck her the last time she was here, and that chaplain told the story of the interview. It was all set down to his account. I wish he could come back to earth to enjoy the reputation I have built for him.

This is a long explanation, and somehow the problem with which I started seems to remain pretty much where it did. There is a strange buzzing in my ears, too, and strange lights flash before my eyes, and strange things seem to shape themselves in the corners of my cell. I think I must be going mad in my last hours through my ceaseless efforts to work out the problem of my lost identity. Who am I? It would be a satisfaction to know. If I were free I think I would advertise for myself, but then they don't advertise here, except when they want a new warder. Let me try to work out the question according to algebra. I am  $x$ —an unknown quantity, and he—well, I will call him  $a$ , and the chaplain is the devil, and—but perhaps I have forgotten all the algebra I ever knew, for my proposition seems to be rather incoherent. I will put the question to the soulless clod in the adjoining cell; he is in here for life, because he killed his wife, or something equally stupid, so he will have plenty of time to think it over. Poor beggar, it will amuse him some of these long nights after I am gone. I will howl my statement of the position to him through the wall, and see how he likes it. Or, perhaps, the hangman would know—or the chaplain. I will try him—and, by good luck, here he comes. Ah! he is gone. Apparently, there is something about my aspect that makes him prefer the other side of the cell door to this. But I will have him yet. I will bite my way through the panels, and lay my hands on him, and

then I will kill him, and—but I am wandering from the point. I must be calm. I will wait till that reverend ventures in again and places his hand in mine, and opens his battery of platitudes, and then I will dash his dreary head against the wall, and dance on his remains, and sing the song of the butchered chaplain. I will make him into an opera, and go in for festivity. I feel the afflatus coming upon me—ah! this is something like joy—I will ask that beetle-browed ruffian in the next cell to come in through the wall and we will make a night of it—hurrah!—and then I'll kill him, too—he will never be missed, and besides he is miserable, and it will cheer him up to be killed a little—and then—and then—I——

## The Utterly Dreary and Purposeless Episode of a Wet Day.

**I**T is raining heavily and hopelessly in a very small township among the mountains. The landlord of the empty hotel leans over the counter of the empty bar, and looks out speechlessly at the muddy road which leads both ways to nowhere.

Presently two bright young inhabitants enter and demand refreshment. The landlord apparently knows them well, for he says, curtly, "Got the money?"

They haven't got the money, but one of them opines that the landlord might trust a bloke.

The landlord responds briefly, "I'm off you!"

The pair take the rebuff in good part. They remark in a friendly manner that the landlord is "a hard case," and they both swear a little. Then they wander to the door and look out at the thick atmosphere, which is full of strange noises like those a cow makes trying to get its foot out of the mud, and view a forlorn team going past, and a wet hen scudding under bare poles for a place of shelter.

After a while one of them expresses in an abstracted fashion a desire to be stricken dead, and the other silently acquiesces.

By and by, eight railroad builders tramp in heavily, and remark that it is a bad sort of day, and call for whisky. The landlord regards them suspiciously, but fills the order. The spokesman puts down some money and offers to owe him the other sixpence.



The landlord evidently disapproves of this arrangement, but the customer reminds him that five of them have at different times had the horrors in his house, also that they spent all their last pay there, and they state that he might trust "a bloke," and one of them offers to fight him and all his relations for the sixpence, and at last peace is restored.

Then there is an interval of silence until the man in the corner lifts up his voice in a monologue and utters eight theological statements. He addresses himself to nobody in particular, and nobody answers him. After he has finished off with a specially bright and exhilarating remark, there is more silence.

Suddenly at one end of the room a great and violent campaign arises out of nothing.

The man with the patched pants is holding forth at a great rate to the man with the torn hat.

"I can fight the best man in this room," he says enthusiastically. "I can fight the best man in the town. I'll fight the best man in the country, an' knock him out in three rounds. I'll fight you now for a quid."

The man with the torn hat simply says that the man with the patched pants is guilty of perjury in the first degree; but the smallest man in the room sails in with a yell: "I'll fight you for a hundred quid an' put the money down."

Then there is chaos and pandemonium. One after another drifts into the riot until eight men have agreed to fight each other on the spot for an aggregate of £1000 or so. In the course of the discussion each man has called every other one quite a number of things all suggestive of ignorance and incapacity. The vociferations of the company can be heard over several acres of arable land. The landlord looks on in sleepy unconcern, and the wet hen, which has evidently heard it all before, steps in out of the rain.

When the parties have all agreed to fight immediately for enormous amounts, they sit down

or lean against the wall, and the subject drops. Apparently any person who proposed to fight in real earnest would be scouted as a lunatic. No one smites another. No one puts up any of the vast sums that are to be fought for. The fiercest-looking desperado in the crowd steps out to look at the weather, and comes back disgusted.

After a while one of the party asks another to sing something. The general consensus of opinion is that the person in question can't sing worth a cent. He settles the point by lifting up his voice in a rough but pathetic melody with the refrain, "Do you Ever Think of Mother?" It is tolerably well sung, and the company stops quarrelling till it is finished. Then one person, who seems almost affected, states that it is a good song. He also adds approvingly that the melodist can sing better than a heap of crocodiles. The singer takes the compliment badly.

Two more men drop in. One is very wet; the other is wetter, and is also angry about something. The wet man pays for drinks. The wetter man speaks with disgust of the universe.

Someone asks the wet intruder if he has heard from Dick.

A voice from the corner interposes the statement that Dick is a scoundrel of the worst description.

Someone else remarks irrelevantly that Dick can jump all right, and enquires, in a large and general fashion, if anything is any good.

Then a person of no importance says that Dick can't jump over an egg, and the wet hen flees in disorder on hearing the news. A shambling person says that he (not Dick) can jump five feet ten inches standing, and the man with the worst hat says he can jump six feet, and another man offers to jump the best man in the country for fifty quid, and everybody talks at once, and calls every other person a fraud with embellishments, and the old pandemonium starts all over again.

And in the midst of it a peaceful-looking man who is sitting near the door lifts up his voice on his own account, and altogether apart from the question at issue, and makes a violent and wholly useless statement at great length. Nobody takes any notice of him. By this time a tall, slab-sided man is holding his belt at a height of nearly seven feet above the floor and offering to jump over it there and then for a hundred quid. Everybody agrees to jump immediately for a hundred quid and put the money down. Then the subject drops. Nobody puts down a single copper and nobody jumps up a single foot.

A cracked bell rings, and a few who are apparently more solvent than the rest go in to dinner. They swear a little in a non-committal sort of way. After dinner one sneaks away to the kitchen and makes a matrimonial proposal to the waiting-maid. It transpires that he is a constant admirer, and proposes ineffectually at every visit. In wet weather he hangs about the hotel and proposes more or less all day long. As I pass the kitchen-door some scraps of his wooing are wafted out along with the odour of hash and other things. He is telling the girl that he will marry her any time she will have him. He also expresses a wish that arrangements may be made whereby he may be struck blue. As he is struck considerably blue already, with four days' stubble on his face, this seems superfluous.

It still rains dismally. The landlord lounges about and refuses to be negotiated with save on a cash basis and the damp hen cruises round dejectedly.

All through the long, dank afternoon the railroad-builders sit around and put a great strain upon the truth. There is a dreadful sameness about the strain. One of them once owned a horse that was faster than any other horse in the country. Each of the others owned a horse that was faster still and the man who speaks last always owned the swiftest horse. Another of them has licked the most formidable pugilist ever



known, and the rest licked a much more formidable one. The last one licked Goliath with one hand and practically ate Samson alive.

A small lank-haired man has run 100 yards in nine seconds, and it transpires that all the rest had done the same distance in eight seconds. They have all ridden fabulous distances in the shortest time on record, and fallen off quite unprecedented heights, and each one has utterly extinguished everybody he met in every possible line of industry. They are all prepared to bet fifty quid that they did all these things, and a hundred quid that they will do them again, on the spot, at that very instant, if required. Almost all of them hastily feel in their pockets for the wealth of all the Rothschildren, which money they are prepared to stake as evidence that they can do everything. Nothing happens.

About five o'clock two young men have a disagreement, and undertake to slay each other for twopence. Nobody is injured, however.

The lying, and the disagreement between the two young men and much tobacco, fill in time somehow till tea. Then the bell rings again, and the same crowd goes in and says much the same things that it said at dinner. Also, the same individual drifts into the kitchen afterwards, and doubtless renews his overtures in the same form of language as heretofore.

Then they fill in the long, wet evening with more tobacco, and tell all the old hyperboles over again without variations, and get up the same old arguments and agree in the same old language to fight each other for a hundred quid, and to run each other for a hundred quid, and to jump each other for a hundred quid, and to do all manner of things for the same large sum of money.

At nine o'clock I go to bed, but the voices of the company rise up from below and keep me awake. Next morning it is still raining. The same crowd, or another just like it, is there again in the middle of

the same old performance, so I decide to go on my way. As I get on the roof of my steed and depart I hear the voice of somebody who is telling his weary horse-narrative over again for the fiftieth time, and somebody else is relating how he almost killed a champion pugilist before the beginning of the first round, and another man says he has jumped 25 feet 10 inches high or more, standing, and they are all backing themselves to do it again on the spot for more money than anybody can remember.

If ever I meet these men again in this world I will know them by that horse-tale they are always telling. And if ever I meet them in the next world I will know them, for I will hear a discordant voice offering to jump Gabriel the Archangel for a hundred quid.

## In the Land of the Unspeakable Turk.

LET us sit down together, brethren, and consider that odd corner of the land of the Unspeakable Turk, which is comprised in Palestine and the adjacent land of Syria, and great is the unspeakableness thereof. As a blight the Turk is possibly rivalled by the Persian and the Moor, but on this point there is no assured evidence. Some authorities declare that there is no one like him except himself and the Devil; and that, in the matters of energy, punctuality and business capacity, he isn't a patch on the Devil.

There are roads in Palestine here and there, and there are railways here and there. The old Romans were hefty road-makers, and even after centuries of neglect it is a blessed circumstance in places to strike a fragment of the ancient Italian highway, and do some good travelling. The Crusaders did a little work of the same sort, but not much. They were a valiant lot of crustaceans, but no engineers. Then the French rushed an army into the country some 60 years ago, and did many things. That was soon after the Crimean War, at which period the Unspeakable, in his deep gratitude for the British, French, and Italian aid which had dragged him out of a hole, promised to reform, and live cleanly, and take his front feet out of the trough. So he started a general butchery of the Christian population of Syria, and the infuriated Gauls came armed to ask what he meant by it. These invaders were road-makers of great tonnage. They



constructed the first highway from the coast to Jerusalem, and the first highway from the coast to Damascus. That city, the second or third in the great Turkish Empire, was formerly reached by a sort of goat or ant track. Commerce was carried on camels, horses and mules, and a tribe of robbers, located half-way, generally took half the goods. If the traveller had no goods they usually tried him for being without visible means of support, and cut his throat. The earmark of the liar of Lebanon in olden times was his boast that he had ridden alone from Beirut to Damascus. When he said that, a great silence fell on the public-house, and presently, one by one, the audience rose and left. The Turk never interfered with the robbers, and they throve for centuries, and handed down their job from bleeding sire to son, as Byron has it. Then French workmen started to build a splendid highway over the mountains, and shot the Arabs who ordered them to leave off. Next the strangers put caravans of waggons on the road, and carried goods far below the old rate, and their drivers shot the Arabs who came to demand half the property. Likewise they established a coach service, and the escort shot the Arabs who waylaid the vehicles and demanded the travellers' valuables. Next a railway was built, and when the remnant of the same old tribe started train-wrecking, the Frenchmen gave way to unreasoning anger, and shot so promiscuously that the last of the robbers fled the country in dismay.

All the railways in Syria are French except one, which will be described later on.

The Turk has built one road himself and is making another. Fate has driven him to it. The allegedly Holy Land lives mostly on the pious swindle—in fact, if it were not for the pious swindle and a certain amount of belated agriculture, the place would have to be abandoned. And the pious swindle lives on the foreigner. The hardy old pilgrim of other days, whose faith was strong and his feet tough, took things as

they came. He was generally a male. He arrived from countries where the tracks were none too good, and he was accustomed to hard travelling and hard living. So he hoofed and camelled and donkeyed through the land, making small complaint; and reflected that the worse his corns were on the path to Jerusalem the easier they would be on the narrow way to Paradise. And the owner of the land said "Bismallah," or words to that effect, and let it slide.

Then in later years came a new type—the tourist or pilgrim tourist. He was often a female, and sometimes American at that. He was accustomed to easy travelling. He had much money to spend, and promised to be a great asset if he wasn't scared away. Hotels, more or less comfortable, were built for his accommodation, and European hotelkeepers began to multiply, for the Unspeakable doesn't keep hotel—he doesn't know how. Lager beer, whisky and cognac arose in the land. Plug tobacco and cigarettes appeared on the horizon. There was born a demand for new things, and the dazed Ottoman, feeling that the foundations of the earth were giving way beneath his feet, had to sit up and take notice in his own obscure way.

Unfortunately, though he built one road and badly muddled another, he has not yet learned that roads require repair. His great and notable effort leads from Jerusalem to Jericho, the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Seemingly it was a good work once, though some of the grades are terrible. Now it is a variable quantity. It has had every possible chance, for the wheeled traffic consists solely of light vehicles carrying tourists; the rest of the scanty trade is mere camel and donkey wanderings, and the passage of the local pedestrian, stepping lightly in his skirts and flat shoes, or on his bare horny feet. There is little rain to destroy the surface, hardly a tree to fall across it, and illimitable limestone for repairing purposes. Yet most of the mountain section is just Sheol and the level

section is mostly a ribbon of dust and rocks stretching across a plain of rocks and dust. There is not one maintenance man on the whole route; it is alleged that there never was one; it seems probable that there never will be one. The Unspeakable, viewed on the evidence, doesn't know a maintenance man from a blue giraffe with red stripes and a burning torch on its head.

So the summer visitor to Jericho rises at 3 a.m., and has a snack beneath the stars, and flees early towards the glory of Solomon in a sort of four-wheeled cab with three horses—the wise horse in the middle, the foolish horse on the right, and the dissipated horse on the left. He does this because the animals would probably faint by the wayside unless they had a chance to get into the cool mountain air before the heat and burden of the day, and journeying is slow. Even under the most favorable circumstances the defendant walks over the most perpendicular section of the way. It is a wonderful sight to see the three steeds clawing up the wall of the Ottoman road with the carriage dangling behind and all the luggage pouring out at the back, and falling into Moab.

The local peasant farmer is to be met frequently on these roads, hunting his crop to market on the back of a donkey or hunting the empty donkey home again from market. He is a simple and interesting agriculturist. In the mountain country of Judah he sometimes fences in his bit of land with hunks of the loose and abundant limestone, to keep the hyena out of the crop, while at other times he leaves it unfenced. But then there is hardly any cultivation in the mountain country. On the plains he usually fences with thorns, or else, again, he doesn't fence at all. He ploughs up the soil with a quaint and hunchbacked old circumstance, which suggests a plank with a hairpin at the end of it. There are said to be exceptions to this rule, but I saw none of them. He sows the seed by hand, and harrows with something what looks like the plough's small brother. When





"The three steeds clawing up the wall of the Ottoman road."

the crop is ripe he hews it down by hand, and deposits it in heaps on the ground. And then comes the great operation of threshing, which consists, as a rule, in harnessing two or three cattle together, and driving them to and fro over the piled-up produce from early dawn to dark. Why the wretched animals do not fall down from sheer giddiness is a mystery. But they go round and round and round with infinite patience, and the man on the land bolts continuously after them with shouts of encouragement, and at last the work is done, or half done—at least it is done as well as the circumstances allow. It is all as it was in the days of the late Moses, when the Hebrew was forbidden to muzzle the ox as he stamped on the wheat. The ox is still unmuzzled, but he doesn't appear to eat the wheat. Perhaps he is too dizzy. Perhaps the frenzied being who runs after him all day has taught him better. Possibly he is so sick of his job that he hates the very mention of wheat, and can't even endure to read the grain market quotations. Or, maybe, he is more particular than his master, and refuses to eat trodden-on food.

Even in immovable old Palestine, however, the ox isn't an invariable institution. Sometimes a horse drags a stone over the grain at the end of a rope. Sometimes a donkey drags a plank. Or, again, by way of reckless innovation, the horse may drag the plank and the donkey drag the stone.

Winnowing is a simple business. Some time, when there is a gentle breeze, the Palestine farmer throws his crop up into the air with a shovel. He stands to leeward, so that it won't fall into his eye. The height to which he throws it depends on the strength of the breeze. The grain comes down in a fairly perpendicular fashion. The chaff blows a few yards away. When the whole output of the farm has been shot upwards at the stars some three or four times, the owner inspects the result with the naked eye, and paws it over by hand. If he is satisfied, the matter ends

there; if he isn't satisfied he throws up the great natural resources of the country once more. Then he bags the finished result, puts six bags of it on three small donkeys, to the almost total obliteration of the donkeys, and runs behind with encouraging shouts for 18 or 24 or 36 miles to market. And when he has sold the corn it is ground by hand (grinding corn is a simple but monotonous occupation for the blind, who are a strangely numerous race in the land of the Unspeakable), and made by hand into a large, thin, flapjack sort of thing, and the intending customer overhauls the pile by hand till he finds a flapjack which commends itself to him. Meanwhile the farmer, as already mentioned, either chases his three discharged donkeys home in ballast, or else he rides one donkey and chases two.

There are good and sufficient reasons why the farmer of Palestine adheres to his old methods of conveyance. He has hardly heard of a wheeled vehicle, except the one the tourist rides in. There isn't even a visible wheelbarrow in the whole of old Canaan. It would be folly to buy a vehicle if he had the money and the knowledge, for a donkey can go almost anywhere, and there is a sort of spongy adhesiveness about a camel which almost qualifies that beast for climbing a tree or walking on the ceiling. On the other hand, a cart can only go to the few places which are accessible by road. Moreover, any great increase of wheeled traffic would be bad for the neglected roads; in fact it might obliterate them altogether, and then the donkey, instead of having some kind of highway in places, would have to cling with his teeth to the mountain side everywhere, and let itself down absurd precipices by the tail. When that result came about, the farmer would have to break up his cart for firewood. And before half the cart was burned the Unspeakable would probably come along and arrest him for spoiling the road, and give



him six months in a gaol that would make even a dog angry.

The small agriculturist of Palestine—especially in the south, where much of the land is poor and where there are fewer beneficent remnants of the French occupation than in the north—is not a rich man. Where twenty-five people do by hand the work that one might do by machinery, wealth is naturally a scarce object. The average bucolic person of Judea has no piano, no gramophone, no pictures or oleographs, no glass windows, no books, newspapers, theatres, cinematograph shows, lectures, chimney, clock, watch, or prospects, and he has no furniture worth mentioning. If he is of the better class, his residence is a square, flat-headed stone building of one or two rooms, fitted inwardly with an earthen floor, some cooking utensils, and sundry articles of clothing, but he may hang out in a brushwood-and-cloth hovel or a tent. His position is uncertain; his education (in the ordinary acceptation of the term) is almost nil. Yet, so far as it is possible to judge on a very brief acquaintance, this neglected individual should be the hope of the community. He is generally straight and sinewy, with a pleasant face, white teeth, and good brown legs, which traverse the alleged roads of the Unspeakable at a very respectable rate. He seems, on the whole, a hospitable and agreeable person. I met two of him busy watching about four sheep amid the ruins of the great temple of Samaria, and the kindly insistence with which this party made me drink coffee out of a shovel left a deep impression on my mind. When the Turk is quite dead, and is deeply buried, and his remains have been squashed by a 100-ton monument, with an inscription on it setting forth that for him there will be no resurrection, there should be a future before the Arab of Palestine—not the Bedouin Arab, who is supposed to be the old lost Hebrew tribe of Simeon gone to the dogs, but the more peaceful specimen of the race. At present, however, he is so backward that he hardly

knows he is backward. In other words, he hardly knows that anybody else is forward or that there is any such place as forward.

Yet this man lives in a land which, despite patches of barrenness, has great possibilities. It is almost a treeless country now, by reason of the waste and folly of many centuries; but it was well-timbered once, and it might be so again if the Unspeakable, wandering around in the fez that is imported from Austria, had any more idea of afforestation than he has of whale-fishery. The wretchedly bare and untenanted hills of Judea and the nude mountains of Moab might be transformed into a waving mass of tree-tops, and there is no reason why the almost dead and gone cedar should not be planted again on Lebanon. There are regular winter rains, and there might be the "latter rains," as there were in days of old, if the arboreal hair were restored to the nude, white, glistening scalps of the ranges. Almost anything would be possible with a Government that knew enough to plant trees, make roads and railways, supply education, encourage industry, and hang its corrupt officials. Irrigation exists only in one or two spots, and on a very small scale, yet the chances are enormous. In that respect the valley of the Jordan is probably one of the best propositions in the world. It is wider than most of the Nile valley, yet the Nile valley is the whole wealth of Egypt. It is flat, exceedingly rich, it lies mostly below sea-level, it is shut in by abrupt hills, and it is furnished with a fairly large, swift and never-failing river. Once this region was a land of plenty and densely peopled. But the curse of the Unspeakable came upon it, and the irrigation works fell to pieces, and the cultivators fled or died, and the towns perished, and even the grass gave up the ghost when it saw the evil, bloated circumstance of the oppressor's hat on the skyline. Nowadays the Jordan runs to waste, like practically every other river in an aged and mouldering land.



The average village of Palestine consists of square stone cottages, glaring white or light grey outside, and murky and unfurnished within; older stone cottages that have fallen into ruins; traces of very old cottages which have been practically obliterated; debris and dustheaps. The alleged streets are hardly ever wide enough to admit a vehicle, and even when they are, there is so little spare space that the passengers frequently get out and lift the back wheels round corners. Also, the streets are all holes and hills, and are sometimes at such an angle that a dog slides across them one way and waits for a favoring wind to help him back. There is no port at Jaffa because the Unspeakable doesn't make ports; ships simply anchor in the Mediterranean. There is no real port anywhere save what Nature or the French invaders constructed.

There is no road by which a carriage can traverse the holy city of Jerusalem. Cabs come in a few yards and bring up at the hotels, but if they went further they would rush down stairs, or get bogged in narrow bazaars that are roofed in and full of shops adorned with all manner of tawdry glories; also, the horse would slide on old Roman grease, and fall down and break his neck; and the stench would clothe the passenger with a garment of cursing; and the driver would get into trouble for running over Ibrahim, the cripple, in the middle of the street. The Turk doesn't propose to make a carriage road through Jerusalem. Perhaps it is as well. It might be wiser to destroy Jerusalem, to put dynamite under it and blow up all its hills, and fill the Valley of Jehosaphat and the Vale of Hinnom with the ruins—in short, to wipe out the place so utterly that it would be unrecognisable for evermore. Or else, it might be put into the hands of some strenuous Power which would gaol nine-tenths of its priests for getting money by false pretences, taking a mean advantage of the weak-minded, robbing fools, and driving pious cranks to plain insanity. And



it wouldn't be amiss to disinfect part of the other tenth.

Jerusalem is the world's great confidence trick. It is a place with stately ramparts outside and donkeys and slush and hypocrisy within. Every possible item of Scripture history has been scraped together there or thereabouts, and the alleged site is always on view for a consideration. Inside the great boss fraud—the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—are shown, among other things: (1) The exact centre of the earth; (2) the exact spot where Adam was created; (3) the place where he was buried (he was evidently an untravelled man); (4) the pillar to which Jesus Christ was bound; (5) the cell in which He was temporarily confined (though the church was admittedly built by the Crusaders many centuries after His death; (6) the scene of the crucifixion; (7) the three holes in which the three crosses were placed; (8) the spot where Jesus and Mary stood immediately before the crucifixion; (9) the really authentic spot where Christ's raiment was parted; (10) the spot where the women stood while the body was laid in the tomb; (11) the tomb of Christ; (12) the places where the angels sat after the resurrection; (13) the tomb of Nicodemus; (14) the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. These are a good many items to crowd into one church, yet they are not all. In addition, there is the exact spot where Longinus, the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Christ upon the cross, did penance for his sin. He had been a one-eyed man, but some of the sacred blood dropped on his blind eye, and his sight being restored he was naturally converted. At the same time, some of the blood fell through a hole in the earth on to the skull of Adam, and that Oldest Father of the human race instantly rose from the dead, though his after proceedings are enshrouded in mystery. It may be that he went on the land. Also, in the same crowded tabernacle are exhibited the footprints of the Lord; the stocks in which His feet were confined; the place

where He was scoffed at by the ribald multitude; the place where He appeared after the resurrection; the place where Abraham found the ram; and many other interesting sites and details.

There is something marvellous about all this accurate definition when it is remembered that Jerusalem has been twice wiped off the map since the day of the Crucifixion; that it was for 60 years a practically uninhabited pile of ruins; and that after this long abandonment it was rebuilt by pagan folk who neither knew nor cared for the sacred sites.

Despite the monstrous grab done by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there are plenty of show places left. The room of the Last Supper is revealed; it is a large upstairs apartment, supported by pillars, of fairly recent appearance, and frankly admitted to be only about 600 years old. Then there are the tomb of David, the House of Caiaphas, the stone on which the disciples sat while the Lord washed their feet, the rock on which Abraham proposed to offer up Isaac, the gate through which Adonijah fled when Solomon was crowned, the gate through which Stephen was taken to be stoned, the gate through which the Lord passed on His way to Calvary, the identical stone on which the rooster stood when it crowed at St. Peter (the bird itself, strangely enough, is not shown), and the place where Peter stood when the fowl of evil omen lifted its voice in reproach. A coarse and fearsome picture expounds the Redeemer, Peter and the rooster all standing on one square yard of space. Furthermore, there are on exhibition the apartment wherein Jeremiah wrote his prophecies, and the tombs of the Virgin Mary, of her parents, of Joseph of Nazareth, Absolem, Jehoshaphat, Zacharias, St. James, the Hebrew prophets, the Hebrew kings, the Hebrew judges—in fact, the burial place of almost everybody except Goliath and the Devil.

And all these, though they may seem to constitute a fairly large order, are only the crude beginnings of the trouble. In and close around Jerusalem are shown, for sufficient and reasonable monetary consideration, part of the house of Pontius Pilate, the road to Calvary, with the different places at which the Cross was put down for a rest (there are about 14 of them, and the numbers are printed large on the wall), the other tomb of Christ (admission  $4\frac{3}{4}$ d.), the place where Pilate washed his hands, the old armchair of St. James, the spot where St. James was beheaded (the Turkish Government, however bad it may be on roads, has a wonderful capacity for keeping spots in good repair), the house of Annas, the quarries of Solomon, the stables of Solomon, the pool of Solomon, the pool of Hezekiah (apparently no Hebrew king was complete without a pool), the garden of Solomon, the garden of Jehoshaphat (no Hebrew king was quite complete and finished without a garden), the place where Judas hanged himself, and the bit of land which was bought with the money returned by Judas just before he suspended payment. Judas isn't still hanging; presumably his remains were cut down by parties who are still at large. And the visitor can also see, on very moderate terms, the spot where the Lord prayed in Gethsemane, the spot where the disciples slept in a row under a rock, with exact details as to which one was at that end and which one at this end; the spot where Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, the place of the Ascension, with the Lord's footprint plainly visible on the rock, the precise scene of the utterance of the Lord's Prayer, a well belonging to that eminent squatter Job, the place where the disciples met after the Crucifixion, the place where Jesus wept over the forthcoming downfall of Jerusalem, the house of Mary and Martha, the tomb of Lazarus, a large boulder which Abraham brought from Hebron (possibly for road metal), the inn to



which the Good Samaritan brought the traveller who fell among thieves, and a fountain at which the disciples once stopped to drink.

Furthermore, the breathless and staggered traveller has expounded to him the place where the ravens fed Elijah, the mountain on which the Saviour was tempted by Mephistopheles, the fountain whereof the waters were purified by Elijah, the scene of the Israelitish crossing of the Jordan, the precise location of the Lord's baptism, a fountain at which the Wise Men drank (they saw the reflection of the Star of Bethlehem in the water and nearly swallowed it in their haste), the mark of a human body on a large stone showing where Elijah lay down, a footmark left by Elijah when he stood up either before or after he lay down, Herod's grave, the grave of Rachel (wife of Jacob), the well that David badly wanted to drink out of, an underground sort of place in which the Redeemer was born (the exact spot is pointed out to an inch), and the manger in which He was laid. This manger is an affair of finely-polished marble and much costly decoration; it is probably worth £60 of good British money, and it suggests that the cow of old Judea was a madly extravagant animal. These last two shows are located in a huge church like a fortress. It has one door into which one person can enter at a time in a stooping position, so that the place can't be rushed by large numbers of hostile individuals. As it is shared by various Christian sects, a Turkish soldier stands around at service time, armed, and with a scoff of his countenance, to prevent the denominations disembowelling one another. There is nothing more reprehensible than a disembowelled denomination.

The room where the innocents were massacred is also shown, though why they should have been all brought together in one room passes comprehension. As for such small dust as the death-bed of Moses (seen in the distance), the tomb of Moses, the location of

the baptism of the eunuch, the oak that Abraham sat under, the field in which the shepherds watched their flocks on the evening of the nativity, the house of Tabitha, the house of Simon the tanner, the yard in which he tanned, and the well from which he drew water to tan with, they are lying around in heaps.

They have a wonderful memory for localities, these coarse, shameless, polyglot frauds of the city which is called Jerusalem, but which, by reason of its ancient shoddiness, is only Jerry. The sites which they so friskily identify fall into three separate categories. The newest ones stand for events which are blurred by the haze of some 1870 years, during which period the old Hebrew metropolis was twice levelled to the ground and made a mere heap of ruins, and a vast proportion of the Jewish nation was destroyed, while the survivors were forbidden to even approach the old site. Then Jerusalem, as hereinbefore mentioned, was rebuilt, once by pagans, who had not the slightest desire to preserve the old landmarks, and who didn't know the old judges, the old kings, the old prophets, or the apostles from a crow or a battleaxe; and again it was rebuilt by a mixed race of ignorant folk. The events of another series are still older; the veil of some 26 centuries hangs over them, and they are further blotted and obliterated by Nebuchadnezzar's extinguishment of Jerusalem (the old city fled right off the map three times) and by the great Captivity. And the oldest stock or heap of alleged facts is supposed to have accurately survived, not only all these vicissitudes, but also the long absence in Egypt and the other troubles of some 4000 illiterate years. For these reasons the stranger is apt to look with a glassy eye on Job's well, and to lend a deaf ear to the stone on which Jacob rested his head when he had his famous vision.

Lies, ancient and modern, are the visible means of support of southern Palestine. Everywhere is found the holy sham in a maddened hat waiting to



take the pilgrim's money, and to show him in return the mark left by the ear of Jeroboam's uncle. Almost the only things that can be seen gratis are the Unspeakable Turk and the cave in which Samson hid himself either just before or just after he slew 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of a common domestic animal. This dry but notable hole lies close alongside the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway line. It once, so I was told, lay alongside the bridle track further north, but it was removed when the railway was built. Being a lonesome curiosity which herded together all by itself, it was never a paying investment.

Still there is some excuse for the confidence man of Palestine, in all his Greek and Roman and Abyssinian and Samaritan varieties—the friar of orders grey and brown and black, and the monk of the striped communion, and the sandalled person with the drab night-shirt and the rope round his waist, who lives by exhibiting the dog-license of the dog that licked Lazarus. He has to exist, and existence is tough in old Canaan. In some places, where the Unspeakable is unusually rapacious, it is alleged that even the olive trees are being cut down and sold as timber, because the local boss Ottoman taxes them so heavily that the industry is cheaper dead than alive. But this tree-felling doesn't cause the souvenirs "made from wood grown on the Mount of Olives" to be any more reliable. Only a poor smattering of foliage remains on the Mount of Olives—probably not enough to keep the trade in souvenirs going for a year. There is no sign that new trees are being planted, and the feeble haze of dandruff of old vegetation seems to be carefully preserved. It is necessary to retain some faint pretence of herbage on the Mount, else its name would debase into utter mockery. Already one can stand on the top of the historical elevation, and look eastward across the land of Benjamin and the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and far into Moab, and not observe a tree. When war



happens there nowadays, the general who is on the defensive takes up a strong position behind a blade of grass, and waits on events.

There is a Turkish coinage, but, except in the shape of a battered and dirt-colored small change, often as thin as a razor, and with frequent holes bored through it, little of it is seen. I bought a bottle of beer on the border of Benjamin, at a two-roomed stone pub with no chimney, hardly any furniture and an earthen floor. I gave French money, and got English and French change. I gave French money at a pub at Jericho, and got French change. At a canvas and brushwood cafe on the shore of the picturesque Dead Sea—a place where four wild-looking publicans wanted to hold my clothes and my pocket-book while I had a swim—I paid in Egyptian money, and received the change of three countries. The native takes Turkish money if necessary, but, if he can get the French article, he shies at his own like a horse which has found a dead donkey in the middle of the road. There was such an animal—old and half-eaten—on the highway between Jerusalem and Jericho; and when my team saw the skeleton and the rag of hide, it leaped sideways almost into Gilead.

The Turkish post office is very much on a par with the Turkish coinage. It is reputed to lose one-half the letters, and to spend six days in carrying the other half two miles. Consequently Britain, France, Germany, Austria, and other countries have acquired the right to run private post offices, so that their subjects may hear occasionally from home and mother.

Churches are everywhere—Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian, Armenian, Abyssinian, also sundries, casuals and heterodox, odd-job churches, churches of no account, joint-stock churches, in which various sects run their various shows, with the Ottoman infantry man on guard to keep the maddened but affectionate Christians apart, Maronite tabernacles, holy fanes run by holy fathers and holy brothers,





establishments run by persons with shaven heads and sandalled feet, and others run by individuals with assorted heads and mixed feet. These are quite apart from the numerous mosques and synagogues, and the new mission churches—Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and those belonging to a drizzle of smaller sects. In Palestine an old, chronic religion doesn't build a new church because there is a possible congregation, but because it has found a sacred or allegedly sacred site. At Capernaum, whereof the permanent population is now one ruined synagogue, six large dogs and one brown priest with a hat like a pelican in the wilderness, some £10,000 are being spent on a church which is to stand on the exact spot where Jesus Christ addressed the people. A few miles from old Shechem (now called Nablous) a similar amount is being expended on another church, which is to enclose, and prevent people drinking at, the well where the Lord conversed with the woman of Samaria. Devout and weak-minded foreigners endow these churches, in which the priests drone out services to each other, and to a congregation of nobody at all, and the haunted and haggard hat is carried on their behalf all over the civilised world, year in and year out. Even the old Samaritan sect, which has only 170 surviving members, and which possesses one school, in which six small Samaritans and one Samaritan baby sit on the floor and study Hebrew, has a synagogue in the backest back slum of Nablous, and a high priest who keeps a fruit stall, and an indefatigable old belltopper into which the tourist drops a franc under protest. The Samaritan Church was once a great institution, but it is dying for want of a birth-rate. The young male Samaritan is ejected as a limb of the Devil if he marries outside his sect, and it is difficult to marry inside it, because the old male Samaritan makes part of his income by selling his daughters to the Unspeakable Turk.



Two-thirds of the property in Jerusalem are said to belong to churches and mosques.

Everywhere are British, French and German—also, here and there, Italian and Russian—hospitals, but the Turkish hospital is almost as scarce as an elephant up a tree. Outside Nazareth is an unfinished English hospital. Some Turkish official demanded backsheesh when the roof was about to be put on. Not being mollified with the article, he reported to headquarters that the English were erecting a fort, and that the red standard of revolt would presently go up in Galilee; so the terrified imperial ass at Byzantium stopped the work there and then. Now a new and allegedly reformed imperial ass—he is also said to be a drinky and alcoholic ass—rules at Byzantium, but the prohibition has not been removed.

The French road enables the traveller to reach old Shechem (now called Nablous), where many of the streets are tunnels, being roofed over for the convenience of ladies and cats, who want to pay visits from one house-top to another. No vehicle can go through Shechem, and the old part of the town was last cleaned up by Jacob, that smooth and plausible man who looms so large in early Scripture history.

Samaria, once the capital of the northern kingdom, is honest by comparison with Jerusalem. It only charges the visitor for a view of the prison of John the Baptist. There is a single two-storey house in Samaria nowadays, and it belongs to a wealthy and influential sheik. Four windows, without glass, but richly decorated with iron bars, ornament the front. Two of them are blocked with loose stones to prevent the excited populace looking in at the harem or the harem looking out at the infuriated populace, and behind these bars and stones the ladies of the family enjoy all the discomforts of a home. In the men's quarter is the official reception room, splendidly furnished with a beehive-shaped stone roof, a bare stone floor, two wide window ledges and six cushions.

There the sheik, a perfect gentleman with a considerable reputation as a poet, supplied in quick succession one glass of lemon water, two cups of tea, one cup of coffee, and many cigarettes. From the window ledge I looked on the proud old capital. Outside its present bounds are remnants of the stupendous walls, some bits of the ancient temple, and a few pillars to represent Herod's market place. The crooked ways of the present town are from three to five feet wide, and suggest a stormy sea suddenly petrified and covered with offal, greyish dust and hens. Apparently Israel supplied eggs to the surrounding country. The pale-grey houses are from five to eight feet high. In the lower ones the doorway is four feet high, and inside the taller folk live doubled up. There is no window glass in Samaria. Wealthy citizens have a breathing hole in the wall. The poorer and more debased sorts breathe through the doorway. Furniture is practically unknown. The roofs were once flat, but the pallid debris of ages has changed them into bumpy hillocks whereon the local fowl claws precariously.

There is no road to Samaria, nor to the older Israelitish capital of Jezreel; but then in the land of the Unspeakable it has been estimated that four towns and villages out of five have no road to them. Presumably there was a highway in the great days when Ahab, the king, drove forth to war from the gates of his fortified metropolis, with the banner of Abraham in front, and his mighty men of valor to left and right, and the local small boy hanging on to the tail of the chariot behind, for the small boy is the same in all lands and all ages. Now it is just possible to drive to a spot two miles from the historical city, and after that the stranger proceeds on foot and reaches his destination on all fours. Still if one can overcome the natural obstacles, he is allowed to arrive nowadays—also to depart. It was not always thus. In the earlier days of Abdul Hamid, to be seen going anywhere, except with vegetables for sale, was a



suspicious circumstance, and to be seen coming back from anywhere was almost fatal. Abdul Hamid was so anxious that his own brother (now Sultan) should not commit the indiscretion of going anywhere that he kept him shut up for 30 years—it is alleged, without anything to read. Therefore that brother was worse off than the old nurse in "The Gondoliers," who was supplied with all the illustrated papers in the torture chamber.

Some time in the dim backyard of history the Turkish Government decided to build some 40 or 50 miles of new road by way of supplying a short cut into Galilee. It is wrestling hard with the section between Nablous and Jenin, and this was officially declared open a few months ago. The only drawbacks I found were (1) that a three-mile stretch of the road at the Nablous end was so new that it wasn't made at all, and it was necessary to drive uphill and down over the crops of maddened agriculturists; (2) that a five-mile stretch at the Jenin end was so old that it was overgrown with brambles, and, as the horses wouldn't face them, it was again necessary to rush downhill over the crops and uphill again to regain the road. We did 25 miles in nine hours. The last 16 miles of the Turkish road, from Nazareth to Tiberius, are regarded as a nine hours' job in the wet season.

Beside the blue and beautiful Sea of Galilee one can intercept that infuriated snail, the Turkish train, taking its headlong way along the Turkish railway. There is only one Turkish railway in Syria; all the others are French. The great Ottoman steam vehicle is timed to sprint 176 miles in 12 hours. In my case it reached Damascus nearly four hours late, chiefly through its habit of stopping half an hour at stations, where the legitimate and authorised pause was ten minutes. So long as daylight lasted, the friends of the driver and fireman rallied round them at every stoppage and asked for news. The driver and fireman



squatted on the platform and told the news—told of the twins and the cholera and the robberies and the scandals and the backsheesh. Sometimes they even played cards. There was a pleasant swapping of lies and cigarettes, and everything was cheery and casual. The station-master blew his horn now and then as a sign that the Turkish train was to resume its wonderful Turkish journey; but it didn't start till the driver felt inclined. He was said to be an invalid who suffered greatly from insomnia on the engine, so doubtless the station-master extended to him a special measure of consideration. One station-master told me that the engine was 45 years old, and he gave me the name of a Turkish official who, he said, had gone to France to buy new engines, and had purchased old scrap-heap locomotives for a song in order that he might pocket the difference. He didn't seem to regard the proceeding as unusual, or to think that the eminent Turk would be angry at this public mention of the event.

The water supply on this breathless Turkish express had dried up, and there were no towels. Also the lamps went out as soon as they were lighted.

I failed to find out what explanation the Turkish driver gives when he drives his red-hot Turkish train into that picturesque, raving dust-heap called Damascus, four hours behind his due date. I fancy, though, that he says: (1) It is the will of Allah; (2) he didn't notice the time; (3) the water went "off the boil."

Damascus, viewed from the hills, is a beautiful white city, set in a dense wilderness of orchards. Viewed from within, it is just Damascus. The Abana River roars through the old place, and makes it look cooler and cleaner than it really is. Many European drinks are sold there, but it is generally necessary to find the landlord in his lair, and wake him up, in order to get the drink. It is possible to drive through this venerable capital of Benhadad, but often the

wheels scrape the walls on each side. And when the Corporation has dug a huge hole in the middle of a narrow street, and forgotten all about it for five weeks, the only resource is to take out the horses and lead them around the gaping orifice, and then hire the neighboring population, at two for a franc, to lift the carriage over the obstruction.

At Damascus the polite and voluble dragoman shows the exact spot on the wall where Paul, the apostle, was lowered in a basket. He also adds, quite cheerfully, that the wall was built by Saladin, the Sultan, more than 1000 years after Paul was dead.

Beyond Damascus lies Baal-bek, the city of gigantic ruins, in the walls of which there are single stones weighing 800 tons. The local guide book says that, 133 years after the Creation, Cain built Baal-bek "in a moment of frenzy." So Cain evidently had his crowded moments. The guide book also says that the mastodon must have been employed to carry the stones, and the fact of the mastodon being alive in Cain's time proves that Cain was the architect. But it is just possible that Cain, who, according to some Syrian theories, was 150 ft. high, carried the stones himself.

And further on is Lebanon, the mountain Paradise of a neglected land. It is mostly a Christian country. Years ago the French Government, giving way to sudden excitement, bought itself a club, and hit the Unspeakable so hard on the head that Lebanon has had ever since a Christian Governor and a Christian militia, and the Unspeakable's troops are kept out of the district. And as a result Lebanon is a fairly clean country with good roads, abundant hotels and a general air of prosperity. But beyond it the old Turkish misery starts again. If the Ottoman were boiled he might be bearable, but in his raw state he looks like one of the world's calamities.

## Barrios, Consul for Galatia.

### I.

THE old, rusted, polyglot steamer "Napoli" was aground—glaringly and conspicuously aground—on the Red Sea shore, where the devil used to walk with his nerveless tail making a furrow in the sand. Her bow was up on the beach, while her stern was in the water. She was drying and bleaching and cracking in the hot Red Sea sun. Around her was a glare of color, for the sky and the sea were an intense blue, and the sun was a vivid white, and the land was red and brown and yellow. There was an untidy raffle of cargo on the beach, for the worried and unkempt shipmaster was trying to lighten his disordered sea-vehicle. A few piratical-looking Arab boats cruised about—up and down, back and forward, and to and fro—with the worst possible intentions. Only the stern front which Captain Hannibal Columbus, our courteous and justly-esteemed Italian commander, presented to those skirted and turbaned scavengers of the sea kept them off. A quantity of pedestrian Arabs padded softly up and down the beach. They were obviously prepared to steal the cargo, the anchor, the engines, the boiling water inside the boiler and the flames underneath that same implement. A hungry, predatory, hyena-like lot were these pedestrian Arabs. The commander was holding them off with the aid of his polyglot crew and the moral support of the Italian Consul at El Jumbo. The Consuls of the other five great Powers had assured the Italian representative at El Jumbo that he could depend on them for more moral support should any serious emergency arise.



Our commander was in no way responsible for the disaster that had befallen the "Napoli." He had been in his cabin at the time, trying to eat a much-needed snack of repose. Considering the crowd he had to deal with it might be held that the captain should have anchored before lying down, even if it was broad day and the ship was in the middle of the Red Sea, but apart from that doubt his conduct was beyond reproach. The primary cause of the downfall was the secret drinkings of Demetrius Poliorcetes, the chief mate—at least the drinkings of Demetrius were secret in the sense that he didn't imbibe out of the bottle, on deck, in the garish light of noon, with a brass band to call attention to his deeds. Otherwise the thirst of that Greek officer was as conspicuous as the funnel. His case was afterwards considered by the Marine Board at Jerusalem or some such place, and the result was the suspension of his certificate for a hundred years or so. After that I believe he went into the wine-making industry near Corinth, and died through trying to drink up a large farm in one week.

Contributory causes of our luckless situation were the inefficiency of Selim Smith, the half-breed Egyptian second mate; the boundless incapacity of Abdul Slummock, and the shameful cowardice of Abdul Slush.

We were ashore half a mile or so from the entrance to the harbor of El Jumbo. The "Napoli" had no business or appointment whatsoever at El Jumbo, its next port of call being El Slump, forty miles further up the coast, but strange things happen in the Red Sea—that sea of many wonders and legends and languages.

El Jumbo was just an Arabian town, dirty white or dirty grey, hot, breathless, unclean, lazy, doggy, hostile, ill-paved, flat-roofed and clamorous. It was infested with small donkeys, sagging camels that looked green-mouldy in a side light, and skeleton horses that looked blue-mouldy in any light. It was

peopled by samples of everybody who was black, brown, yellow, bronze, reddish, or mixed, and the air was thick with turbans and many-colored robes. Also the streets were as straight as a serpent and half as wide.

There were three passengers by the "Napoli." We went ashore over the bows of our stranded craft and foregathered with a rusty, dried little Consul. There were very few white men at El Jumbo and they were all Consuls. Also they were all there till they died, or were sacked, or got a small pension and retired into disreputable obscurity. Nobody was ever promoted from El Jumbo because the Consuls there had finished with promotion. Nobody was ever reduced to an inferior post because there was none. It was the sun-blasted town of Dead Finish. When a fairly capable official had successfully disencumbered himself of the respect of everybody who knew him—when he had lightened the ship by throwing overboard the last shred of his reputation, and unballasted himself of all his friends—he was sent to this Arabian cul-de-sac, provided the billet happened to be vacant. If the billet wasn't vacant he might possibly be preserved in an inebriate retreat till an opening happened along. It happened pretty often, for they were old men who went to El Jumbo—old either in years or brandy.

Our Consul was pleased to see us and treated us hospitably. Life was slow at all times there, and just then, so we learned, it was slower than usual. There was a temporary rift in the lute, and the sweet bells of harmony were jangled and out of tune. As a general thing the Representatives of the Powers dined together, and smoked together, and got drunk together after dinner, and told each other old, old tales of their respective wickednesses in all parts of the globe. But on a recent day—some two weeks before Demetrius had filled himself to the roof with liquor, and possessed himself with vain imaginings of a channel where there



was none—the Consul for Poland had been in the act of buying an Arab girl in the slave market for thirty dollars, and just as she was being knocked down to him the voice of the Bohemian Consul had said “Thirty-five dollars.” The Bohemian acquired the girl, and the Polish Consul called him “a swine” for all the world to hear. The insult was cast publicly in the slave market of El Jumbo, and international complications arose. As the Polish Consul afterwards put it to the Consul for Lombardy: “That sort of sordid bargaining is good enough for negroes and Arab traders, but European gentlemen should remember the great traditions of the white race.”

Our Consul told us this tale gravely, as we sat on his verandah and looked down on the wide blue sea. His own sympathies were plainly with the Consul for Poland, and the conduct of the Bohemian Consul in running up the price of the girl was, we learned, viewed with disapprobation all round. It seemed to strike at the root of a solid local institution. Then, as we drank and smoked, our host drifted from one tale to another. He was a wonderful narrator—this little, thin, wiry man with the bald head, the wicked face, the little peaked beard, the untidy white suit, and the great thirst. His thin yellow hand reached for his liquor periodically. His vast black cigar stuck out so that he suggested a crumpled gallows, the man being the upright and the cigar the beam. And now and then a wisp of smoke curled itself into a sort of hangman’s knot.

His talk was mostly about Consuls he had known, and incidentally about Sheiks, Turkish Governors, Military and Naval Officers, Slave-dealers, Merchants, Policemen and Miscellaneous Ruffians with whom he and other Consuls had foregathered while in pursuit of their consular avocations. In the four days of our acquaintance it gradually dawned on me that this little man knew every disreputable port around Western Asia and Northern Africa. Also he knew



every disreputable official in each port, and the price of every official, and his shady back history. He told of how useful concessions had been dragged out of black and brown and piebald public men by judiciously throwing up at them their buried sins and threatening exposure, and of the strange disappearances of individuals who played the game clumsily and threw up the buried sins of turbaned public men without first making sure that the way of retreat was open. Sometimes the thing was done when the public man was between the blackmailer and the door. Sometimes the blackmailer had taken care to be next the door, but had neglected to first search the verandah for possible flank movements on the enemy's part, and consequently he never knew what struck him. He had news about tortures, and midnight crimes, and late quiet burials. He narrated quaint, cat-like, anonymous adventures on strange, flat, Asiatic roofs—profoundly immoral adventures every one, and told with an air of inner knowledge which left the impression that the narrator had himself, in younger days, skimmed lightly over half the cities in the Turkish Empire—had taken a bird-like flight high above the street, bent on errands that couldn't stand inspection. Some of the ladies involved in these tales were dead, it seemed. In fact I gathered that, considering their youth, an amazingly large number of them were dead. Whether their husbands had drowned them in bags with boulders for company, or whether they had been secretly beheaded in the back yard, or how they had passed out, the pleasant little Consul did not say.

Some of his anecdotes were only amusing, but the majority were picturesquely horrible. One related to a German student who felt himself compelled, in self-defence, to sit on the head of a Philistine boatman in eight feet of water. He sat on the Philistine so thoroughly that the latter was presently quite dead. Then the German, being a methodical Teuton, took

the wet body ashore as evidence, and left it on the beach beneath the pallid Syrian stars, while he went to report methodically to his Consul; and the narrator told us, with a cackle of mirth, what the scared, wet student said, and what the angered official said, and the high-handed way the official disposed of the body. As for the student, I fancy he went back to Germany very much downcast and with the Philistine on his mind, and married a girl of wealth and beauty, and lived happily ever afterwards.

There was something, too, about a rich American tourist and a set of lost teeth, and a torn and embezzled coat tail. The scene of this story was laid on an English coasting steamer, with a Scotch captain, and a French first mate, and a useless Egyptian second mate named Mehemet Memphis, or some such name, and a crew just like our own Abdul Slummock and Abdul Slush. This vessel was clawing its way at dusk into the Harbor of Ramoth Gilead on the coast of Palestine, with the captain on the bridge and the first mate in the bows, and nobody else of any value anywhere, and all Philistia clamouring around in boats. Then a skiff hitched quietly alongside, and six shoeless but well-informed Philistines fled like ghosts across the deck and down into the saloon. In a second they were sitting on the head of the only male passenger—a rich and showy American of sky-towering importance. They took his luggage, his “wallet,” his watch, his studs, his rings, his loose change, his cigar case and his cigars, also his gold match-box. They stood him on his head and shook him—all this in the space of about three seconds—to see if any more money would drop out. They tore off his left coat-tail in scorn and disparagement, and then they fled as silently and swiftly as they came, before the two white officers knew that anything was wrong, while Mehemet Memphis, the second mate, hid judiciously among the coals far, far below. The incensed passenger pursued his enemies to the bul-



warks, dropping and fatally treading upon his best teeth in his haste, and there, under the purple sky of Palestine, he stood on the rail and shouted strange things like "Goldarn!" and threatened to soothe the President of the United States on the miscreants, and to have them bitten to death by the ghost of George Washington. In reply there came out of the gloom a wild mocking laugh and a sound of oars. The Scotch captain fled down from the bridge to see what was wrong. The French mate clothed himself with curses as with a garment. Mehemet the Egyptian shoved a pallid head up through a hatchway. Ibrahim Swab peered cautiously around the corner of a deckhouse. And amid it all a penniless, toothless, coat-tailless, dishevelled American leaped and raged and foamed and clamored for the whole United States Navy to come on the instant and bombard Ramoth Gilead into small dust. There was no redress to be had, unfortunately, and the wretched tourist got back to Egypt on a slop diet, with borrowed money and dressed in a misfit coat, and had a new set of teeth made in Cairo, where the pyramids are, and the calm unruffled Sphinx, and the green, immortal Nile.

Again I recall something concerning an Austrian captain of great tonnage—a man of might like Tubal Cain and a tall fellow of his hands—who was instrumental in throwing overboard some twenty non-financial colored passengers. The event happened close to the shore and the non-financial colored passengers could swim. Still the Austrian remarked afterwards, with a tinge of regret, that he had quite forgotten about the sharks. However, the damage, it appeared, was fairly moderate.

And after that the name of Barrios cropped up—Juan Barrios, one-time Consul for Galatia at the ancient seaport city of Jabesh on the coast of Palestine. Of him our host spoke softly with the respect due to a great man—spoke softly as if some one near at hand was yet unburied. Barrios had been a person of



opportunities and he had risen to them. He had made the name of Galatia respected—within limits—at Jabesh and as far as the jurisdiction of the Turkish Governor of Jabesh extended, and that was probably the only region in all the earth where the name of Galatia wasn't disrespected without any limits at all. Along that squalid coast Galatians began, in his time, to be proud of their name and country. Everywhere else their chief ambition was to establish an alibi.

This Consul was a half-breed of sorts. His father was alleged to be a Spaniard and his mother was a pirate or something. He was a picturesque, old-soldierly man; also he was a perfect gentleman with the seven deadly sins. As the representative of a wild-cat State he was ideal. The wandering disreputable folk of Galatia were all over the coast—trading, lying, cheating, and acquiring an abundance of unpopularity. They were always in trouble and always requiring to be dragged out of it by the hair, and as Galatia was no overwhelming Power which could send a fleet to “demonstrate” on the coast when one of its subjects was found out more badly than usual, it required a clawful kind of agent who could snatch the forelock of chance as it passed. And Barrios was a mighty snatcher before the Lord. He grew rich at the business, but on the other hand he gave good service and good value.

This is the story of his chief failure, which also, curiously enough, turned into his biggest success.

## II.

The trouble began one June midnight when Mohammed, who was a large middle-aged Moslem, and Melchisedek, who was a young, slim, sidelong Jew, lurked out of the worst gambling house in Jabesh and started for home. They had just turned the first corner when they met the last person they wanted to meet—an energetic Turkish policeman.

The officer was firm. He said they had been gambling. Doubtless they had been winning money. He considered five francs a fair thing. If that wasn't forthcoming he would arrest them both on charges of brawling, sedition, and using dangerous and inflammatory language about the Caliph. Under the aggravated circumstances of the case they would be fortunate if they got off with a year's solitary confinement. The officer said he was amazed at his own moderation in asking no more than five francs, and he gnashed his hand and held out his teeth—that is to say, he gnashed his teeth and held out his hand.

Then the usual bargaining commenced. Mohammed the Arab uttered a wild howl, and took the Prophet to witness that he had lost all his money and couldn't possibly satisfy the just demands of the most honorable Ottoman "cop." Deftly transferring three ten-franc pieces to his ear he offered to be searched. The man of real wealth, he said, was Melchisedek, the Jew. He had won much money. He could pay double the sum demanded and not miss it. It was the opinion of Mohammed that if the officer would only turn Melchisedek upside down money would pour out of him like the waters that go down at Lodore.

Melchisedek clamored even more loudly. He was, it seemed, completely and utterly ruined, while Mohammed was rolling in ill-gotten wealth—some of which was even then in his ear—and oppressing the widow and the orphan for gain. And there were about two more columns of small print to the same effect.

Just then a dozen more people—the balance of the crowd from the gambling house—loomed along. This made quite too many witnesses. Even in Jabesh on the Mediterranean there are limitations. The policeman retired with curses down a side street.

Then a regrettable and unusual thing happened. When the crowd had passed and the original pair



were again by themselves, Melchisedek, the Jew, remarked that Mohammed the Arab was a treacherous dog, or words to that effect, and Mohammed denounced Melchisedek by all that he held sacred for telling the policeman that he had cash in his ear. No one knows who fired first, but Mohammed was found in the street at daybreak untidily spread out and quite dead, with a donkey looking fixedly at his remains. There was no money about the deceased. Melchisedek escaped with only a slight scratch. He fled home in wild alarm, discharged his one servant, and bade him spread the news that he (Melchisedek) had gone to Damascus on business and wouldn't be back for eleven years. Then he went and hid himself in the cellar. And the faithful servitor explained to all and sundry that his employer was in the cellar but wished it to be understood that he had left for Damascus and wouldn't return for eleven years. This fact, combined with the unfortunate passing out of Mohammed, aroused some comment.

If the police had taken prompt action the story might have ended there, but the Turkish police are unreliable. Sometimes their speed is wonderful: at other times their slowness is amazing. On this particular day the entire local force was busy arranging to burgle the house of the Military Commander, it having become known that part of the garrison's back pay had reached him, and that he was hanging on to it as long as he could, which would probably mean for ever. (In the outlying parts of Turkdom all burglaries are committed by the police or by special arrangement with them.) But while the force lingered and Melchisedek lurked, one man at least was active. This was the cousin of the dead Mohammed—the only relation he possessed in Jabesh, for they both belonged to a Philistine clan at the old town of Gaza where Samson used to be. Selim, the cousin, was at the telegraph office early, and making the wires red hot with the fury of his messages. He



bade the clan at Gaza to drop everything it had in hand, no matter what breakages might follow, and haste to Jabesh, and kill Melchisedek. He didn't attempt the deed himself but he wanted Melchisedek killed. It was almost impossible to kill Melchisedek dead enough to satisfy him. The clerk wrote out these matters thoughtfully, and explained to Selim that messages which contained invitations or incitements to murder were charged double rates under Regulation XXXV., and Selim was so blinded by his rage that he paid the extra money, and thus added a trifle to the clerk's savings. The clerk offered to show him the regulation, being quite aware that Selim was an illiterate.

So far the plot had been fairly simple, but it was here that complications began to set in. According to the outward aspect of things Melchisedek ought to have been comfortably murdered next morning by the folk from Gaza; the police ought to have arrived too late, after finishing the robbery at the house of the Commander; and they should simply have taken Melchisedek's loose change and buried him. It was the telegraph clerk who introduced a new element into the business. He was a Syrian with all the Syrian's astuteness well developed, and he saw possibilities where duller minds might have seen none.

So he left the office to the office boy and hurried by the quietest possible ways to a certain house. In England or America that house would have been surrounded by police, reporters, photographers and half the local population. At Jabesh, on the coast of Palestine, it was like a house of the dead—a place that all men avoided lest they should be regarded as accessories after the act. The Syrian tore his abundant pants getting over the wall, and searched around till he found a door which looked like the one he wanted, and at this door he spoke softly and urged the inmate to come out and commune on a matter of urgent business. A scared voice from within assured him, in

reply, that the building had been unused for years, and that he, the speaker, had lately quitted the town. At all of which the Syrian laughed a ribald laugh and said that the voice of Nobody was much too loud. Then the wretched inmate realised that he had given himself away, and promised with tears not to do it again.

In the end there was a conference and some money changed hands. The Syrian sold the news about the avenging horde that was coming from Gaza. He also sold the news of how the faithful servitor had revealed everything and thus spoiled the effect of the bogus retreat to Damascus, and for a third contribution he suggested a way out.

This brought Aaron into the story, though he stayed in it so short a time that his arrival seemed almost superfluous. Still he played a fairly important part. Aaron was not a Jew as his name seemed to imply, but a newly-arrived and unemployed non-descript. He was young and ignorant and unworldly, and he wore skirts. Both the parties to the conference knew him through his efforts to obtain light and remunerative employment. He was, to the knowledge of the Syrian clerk, then dwelling or boarding at a humpy some two miles from the town—a derelict sort of mud tower by the sea shore. He looked sufficiently like Melchisedek to pass in the dark. It was possible that he hadn't yet heard of the recent stirring events. The Syrian put all this to the agitated dweller in the cellar and exacted a fourth contribution.

On the face of things the scheme was full of weak points, yet it worked admirably. Not a single hitch arose. Aaron was found and brought along in a closed vehicle. The driver of the vehicle didn't discover what was going on and betray the tragic jest—he was almost the only man in this story who betrayed nobody. Aaron had heard nothing; as it proved in the end he never did hear anything. It was explained to him: (1) That Melchisedek had to go away for some time on



urgent business; (2) that the house required a caretaker of unimpeachable reliability as it contained many articles of great value, in corroboration whereof Aaron was shown the outside of a large safe and was deeply impressed thereby; and (3) that he wasn't under any circumstances to leave the premises. A reliable servitor who would attend to his wants was to arrive next day. The remuneration was handsome and the new hand was assured that the engagement might lead to much greater things in the future. These matters being fixed up, the haunted proprietor had two blessings left to pray for—that darkness might come before the police arrived, and that the men from Gaza might be ahead of the police. Further, he had to pray that the Syrian telegraph clerk might keep square, which seemed improbable.

All this time, be it noted, Barrios, Consul for Galatia, hadn't appeared in the story. But the beginning of his troubles was at hand.

That night, in the first hour of darkness, Melchisedek left on foot with the most portable part of his wealth. He was, in the main, a diamond merchant after a small fashion, so his wealth was mostly portable. In between times he was a usurer and swindler. He headed north along the shore so that he might strike the main road to Shechem in the morning and hire a vehicle.

And about 3 a.m. Aaron didn't know what had struck him. The clan from Gaza shot very straight and shot all together. The caretaker of Melchisedek's house had just one moment of wild excitement and then he passed out.

Almost at the same hour the Turkish police were under the painful necessity of shooting Badral Bey, the Military Commander. That unwise person woke up and interfered just when his midnight visitors were getting away with the unpaid wages of the garrison. His revolver was useless, his servant having thoughtfully boiled the cartridges for a consideration. Any



reasonable man might have taken the hint when he snapped the weapon six times and didn't get a single explosion. But Badral was a wholly unreasonable man and tried to attack the police with an axe. His fate has nothing to do with this story except that, as already mentioned, the preparations for the burglary had kept the police busy and prevented them showing such velocity as might reasonably have been expected, either in arresting Melchisedek or in arranging to let him get away for a reasonable cash payment.

The death of Badral Bey aroused the Turkish Governor to excitement. His name was Abdul Gallows. He was a new man at Jabesh—a man from an office at Constantinople and unused to struggling with outdoor problems. He received six pounds a week and his robberies. On the face of things he had two alternatives—to call out the garrison, which would probably have refused to come out now that its back pay had disappeared—and arrest the police; or else to let the matter drop. Instead he urged the force to zealous investigation, and the force investigated zealously. In three days it had the matter cleared up. The crime, it reported, had been committed by a certain aged incurable who begged habitually at a certain street corner just beside the venerable building alleged by tradition to be the house of Simon the Sixpence, mentioned in an early chapter of the Book of Acts. He had been hired to do the deed by the local Lutheran Missionary, a gentle, white-bearded gentleman of profound sanctity and deep German erudition. This person, the force had discovered, led a double life, and was deeply involved in political intrigue. In view of the risk of foreign complications, it recommended that the Lutheran clergyman should not be arrested, but it proposed that his church and school should be closed on a charge of insufficient drainage—which was probably correct, there being no drains in all Jabesh—and his work being thus stopped he would probably go away. As the beggar was quite incurable, it was pro-

posed that he should also be left at large but kept under close surveillance. So a sentry was planted in front of the mendicant for two years, at the end of which time the old man died. After that his son took over the job and begged at the same corner, and the sentry watched him also from sheer force of habit. At last, in disgust, he removed to another stand, but the sentry still remained—again from force of habit—and watched the bare wall and the empty pavement. And there he remains even unto this day, always watching the bare wall and the empty pavement. And the local church has already woven a legend round him, and declares that it has been the custom to place a sentry there ever since the days of Pontius Pilate. For this custom ten different reasons are given, all of which are ridiculous, while no two of them present the slight possible resemblance to one another.

The Turkish Governor of Jabesh had other troubles that day. In fact it was his busy day, and he was on the verge of great things if he had only known it. As already mentioned the men of Gaza had shot very suddenly and very straight in the dim light of morning, and Aaron, the anomalous person who wore skirts, had died in the first flush of his job. Then the Philistines, being, as the American phrase goes, very "fresh," and being the kind of men who never know when to leave well alone, tied a rope to the ankles of the body and dragged it through the streets as far as the Governor's residence, and called on his Excellency, amid general applause, to come down. It was still early—so early that the ruler hadn't yet heard the news of the passing out of Badral Bey. The ruler was unused to be called at that hour. Divided between the fear that it might be an insurrection and the idea that somebody might have turned up with an extra large bribe and an extra large concession to be put through, he issued forth. When he found a crowd of strange savages who sought his advice about the disposal of an obscure remains, his futile rage was terrible to see. He had no sufficient



force at-hand to arrest these brawny Philistines, but he denounced them all he dared, and bade them take their prey off his premises and dispose of it where and how they pleased. So the men of Gaza departed crest-fallen and threw Aaron into the Mediterranean. Then they dispersed to call on friends and indulge in the amenities of social intercourse.

### III.

The same afternoon a depressed little deputation of Jews waited on Juan Barrios, Consul for Galatia. Barrios lived in a fine white stone house on a hill—a comfortable mansion, containing smoking room, drinking room and cursing apartment, also library, dining and drawing rooms, sundry bedrooms, and everything else that a reasonably luxurious person could desire. There were spacious grounds and pleasant fountains attached to this demesne, and it commanded a wide outlook on the sea. Barrios was a bachelor occasionally, and he was rich—a great deal richer than any honest Consul is expected to be. Still, as already mentioned, he gave good value for the money.

The deputation was strangely suggestive of melodrama. It carried the birth certificate, the incriminating document, and the other properties. With profound reverence it showed to Juan Barrios that the late Melchisedek, deceased, had been born thirty years previously on the Isle of Palo Alta, almost the only foreign possession that Galatia possessed. His parents had belonged there before him. Consequently he was a Galatian subject. Amid a multitude of deep grovel the deputation desired to know what Barrios proposed to do about it.

That official had the registers looked up, and to his disgust found that the claim was good. He asked himself with inward bitterness why all the worst scoundrels around seemed to be under his care. Looking back into the hinder parts of his memory he recalled Melchisedek, and decided that Galatia would



probably struggle through without him. Still the country he represented was, in theory, outraged, bereft and despoiled by the loss of Melchisedek, so he assured the deputation that full justice should be done, and that the arm of Galatia was long and reliable. The deputation backed off the premises with respect, getting its feet considerably tangled in its petticoats as it went, and the Consul went to sleep. But before he slept he set the engines of bribery and corruption at work. In other words, he gave Achmet, the Algerian, a small sum out of the petty cash, and told him to go out and see if any information was purchasable. Achmet was nominally the Consul's valet, but in reality he was a proud and wily and quarrelsome son of the wilderness who would have scorned to valet anybody. He was a spy, secret agent, confidence man, a lurker round corners, a watcher through keyholes, a collector of information, a swift runner, an agile thief, and a handy homicide. His views on the sanctity of human life were loose.

This agent spent three hours ransacking the more disreputable parts of Jabesh and returned dissatisfied. His report was that if his employer desired to convict any special Philistine or any six special Philistines of the slaughter of Melchisedek, the evidence might be purchased. On the other hand, it was practically impossible, owing to the darkness and confusion, to find the right Philistine. Achmet recommended the general execution of everybody.

On this information Barrios pondered deeply. Then he interviewed the Turkish Governor and intimated that there would be a formal demand for large cash compensation on account of the lawless taking off of a Galatian subject—to wit Melchisedek, the same being untried and doubtless innocent. He also demanded a rigid police investigation into his slaying. Further, he called for the arrest, without any waste of time in police investigation, of the men who had dragged Melchisedek's remains with loud outeries

through the streets of Jabesh. That insult, he said, was unpardonable.

His Excellency the Governor was more than complaisant. If the Consul would only mention the names of the offenders, or point them out, their fate would make the hair of the civilised world stand on end.

Barrios responded by a flank movement. He didn't know the offenders from a crow. He declined all responsibility. But—and here the smoothness of the negotiation began to be distinctly frayed—His Excellency had seen these criminals and conversed with them. Barrios expressed no opinion about such conduct, but if His Excellency couldn't find them, the Consul declined to be answerable for the consequences. Like Pontius Pilate he washed his hands. The next move was with the Governor, and the Governor swallowed his anger and said the matter would be attended to.

For once a high Ottoman official was as good as his word. Such a thing doesn't happen once in twenty years, but it happened then. The matter was attended to. It received such large and complete attention that next day Juan Barrios received another deputation—a small, furtive deputation of two old men. They almost wept before him, while at the same time they faintly implied that he was an incapable, and that his interference had made things ten times worse than they were before. They nearly hinted that they wished he had never been born. Coming down to particulars they explained that the Governor had arrested, on a general charge of riot and homicide, as many people as the very cramped and uncomfortable local gaol would hold, and they were now awaiting trial, and eating the bread of affliction, and drinking the waters of contumely out of an earthenware pot. There was not one Philistine of Gaza or one Mohammedan of any kind among the confinees. They were all either Jews or Christians, and almost all persons with whom the Governor had had unsatisfactory financial relations—



in other words, he had robbed them in one way or another, but fancied he ought to have robbed them on a larger scale. All the deputationists asked was that the Consul for Galatia would in some way alleviate their hard fate. They were more than willing to drop the question of the death of Melchisedek. Melchisedek might remain dead. They wished he had died early.

Barrios was a man who swore a good deal on small occasions, but this insult was beyond language. His brown complexion went white with anger as he thought of his lost dignity. However, he sent away the deputation with soft words, and it departed sighing heavily and plainly convinced that it had leant upon a broken reed. The back view of the two ancients as they crawled hopelessly away stung the Consul's vanity. He dressed himself carefully and made Achmet, the Algerian, do likewise. He hid sundry weapons about himself, and Achmet did the same. He got on a horse and Achmet got on one also. And with this pomp and state he called again upon His Excellency the Governor, and requested an interview with a ceremony quite unusual.

The great man kept him waiting, and with every minute of the great man's contempt the Consul grew angrier. At last he was received with a coldness that said as plainly as words that trouble was intended. Abdul Gallows had repented of yesterday's acquiescence.

Barrios commenced by a demand that all the recently captured herd of prisoners should be released and the real offenders placed under arrest. He also mentioned that he would make a full report to the Galatian Government, which would doubtless bring pressure to bear at Constantinople.

The Governor asked, languidly, if he thought the Galatian Government would bring much pressure to bear at Constantinople.



Barrios replied in general terms that the Galatian Government had a full knowledge of its responsibilities and could be relied upon to maintain its dignity.

The Governor asked, with plain, unvarnished insolence, if dignity was the strong point of the Galatian Government.

Barrios explained, in effect, that it had more of that article than all the rest of Europe put together.

During this remark the Turkish official professed to be falling asleep through sheer ennui. He slept for a second or two after his visitor had ceased speaking. Then he sat up with a start and inquired what size of a squadron Galatia would probably send if it felt called upon to make a demonstration in the Bosphorus. This was practically a declaration of war, for everybody knew that Galatia had only a pair of second-rate ironclads, and one of these had been sent to the ironmonger to be soled and heeled, and was now held in pawn, amid the laughter of Europe, pending payment of the bill.

It was too much. Juan Barrios dropped the refinements of diplomacy. He shed the garment of civilisation and the ill-fitting cloak of courtesy, and became the buccanneer that nature had intended him for. He threw his principles overboard—besides he had none. In as few words as possible he told the Governor of his (the Governor's) connection with the growing Young Turk movement, of his treasonable correspondences, of the people with whom he treasonably corresponded, of his stealings from the local Customs' revenue, and of his miscellaneous robberies. He mentioned that the Governor's nephew Giaffar had arrived that very week with letters from high personages who were strongly suspected of plotting against the Caliph, and that Giaffar was now living a retired life in the gubernatorial palace. And he finished by saying something in a whisper in the official ear that caused Abdul Gallows Bey to crumple up and turn a sort of sea-green.

There was a long, long pause, at the end of which his Excellency roused up a little and complained that these were not diplomatic methods.

The Consul replied scornfully that a country with only one available warship, and an old one at that, couldn't afford to be diplomatic all the time. Then he retired, and steered a careful course homeward. Even in the brilliant Syrian afternoon he selected his streets judiciously, and once he turned back out of a narrow alleyway and made a quite unnecessary-looking circuit. Jabesh consisted almost entirely of alleyways, and on this occasion the Consul for Galatia evidently regarded some of them as more dangerous than others.

The rest of that day was full of incident.

Within an hour it was known that all the prisoners charged with complicity in the obliteration of Melchisedek had been released. The gaol delivery was done in such absurd haste that half a dozen miscellaneous thieves were thrown out along with the rest, and a murderer who was doing a long sentence in a dark cell was shot into the middle of the street, whereupon he naturally ran for his life.

Inside another half hour a third deputation came to wait on the Galatian agent and overwhelm him with thanks. It bowed itself to the ground and took back all suspicions and aspersions. It intimated that its wealth, its service and its unswerving fealty were laid at the feet of Juan Barrios. It would regard it as a privilege to wash his dishes. It would be the happiest moment of its life if it was allowed to clean his boots. The Consul drove away the deputation with scant courtesy. He felt there was trouble in the air and had no time for empty compliments. If he had to run for his life he didn't want aged deputations coiled around his feet.

By two hours after sunset he learned that all the Philistines from Gaza who were to be found in Jabesh had been arrested. But the Governor had explained at some length that the local gaol was



full—an obvious falsehood seeing that it had been emptied that same afternoon—and had sent them under escort to Gath, presumably to stand their trial. And as they had all escaped from custody half-a-mile outside Jabesh, and had started to walk home comfortably, and their escort had come back convulsed with mirth, the Consul realised that he had made no progress worth mentioning. His Excellency the Governor had resumed his hostile mood and was taking risks.

If one thing was more evident than another it was that the ultimatum which had caused his Excellency to crumple up and turn a sort of pea-green, had missed fire after all. His Excellency plainly saw, or thought he saw, some way to neutralize the Consul's threats, and to make his dangerous information of no account. What was that way? Considering that the Turkish official was a crude ruffian it seemed most probable that shooting would be his first idea—that or a stab in the back. And if he meant anything of the sort he would doubtless move quickly. The case was one in which the man who acted first was liable to come off best. Barrios admitted to himself that his outlook might be better if Galatia was a stronger proposition and if half its fleet wasn't away being soled and heeled.

There was nothing for it but to fall back again on the indefatigable Achmet. He was given some more petty cash for purposes of bribery, and bidden to haunt the Governor's palace more softly than a cat, to corrupt any accessible underling who looked as if he might be of service, to listen at any available keyhole that seemed as if it might have an interesting circumstance at the other side of it, and to bring back news of any unusual signs, doings or persons. The job was wholly to Achmet's liking, and he made his shadowy stealthy way to the scene of action. But there his luck was not good. He peered at gates, he held his breath as he looked over walls, and he



flitted more silently than a dead leaf amid the Governor's trees, yet not one of the three servitors from whom he habitually bought the Governor's information when it was wanted, and to whom he sold the Consul's news when it was saleable, could be found. Finally he did a bird-like excursion up a tree. Then through the window of a sitting-room he saw the Viceroy wading through a mass of papers, and occasionally holding converse with a man who went restlessly to and fro and in and out. From descriptions and information received Achmet guessed this to be Giaffar, the Governor's nephew. He decided to take a breathless chance, and approaching with immense precaution he put a well-worn ear to the keyhole. He could hear nothing. Then he elevated himself and tried to get a better view.

Either he had been less careful than he imagined or the Turkish functionary chose that moment by sheer accident to fly at the door and tear it open. Achmet fell headlong into the room face downwards and uttering a howl of wonder, and the Governor threw himself on top of him, and shrieked for aid, and tried earnestly to tear off his head. One reason why he failed was that he was really tearing at Achmet's feet, the two men having fallen down in a reversed sort of way. Another reason for his failure was that the Algerine didn't wait long enough. He was younger than the Governor and far lighter, and the scrimmage was a battle between a wild cat and a sack of flour. With two kicks and a stupendous heave the Consul's factotum dislodged his incubus and got into an upright position, while the building rang with his Excellency's shouts and vituperations. He leaped once on the Governor to suppress his uproar and then he darted across the room to the opposite window. By taking that line of retreat he threw two stones at one bird in a manner of speaking. In the first place, he only presented the back view of himself to his enemy and avoided positive identification.

Secondly, he didn't run into the attendants who were rushing from various quarters in response to the Governor's clamor. Thirdly, his line of flight took him past the table, and with the instinct of the complete marauder he snatched a handful of the Governor's papers in passing. It was always possible that the papers of a man with the Governor's record would be saleable. With a crash he went through the window just as the serried hosts of the enemy snatched at his legs, and landed on the grass outside. Then he ran, taking the wall in his stride, and as he went the air seemed full of gunshots.

He reached the shore and scurried like the wind along the water's edge where the sand was wet and hard. He ran with his head down and his elbows squared. He had all the world to himself, for the Arab rises early and goes early to bed. He lost all sight and sound of his pursuers, but still he ran. And then his feet caught in something, and with a yelp of surprise he fell and rolled about ten yards.

The obstruction was the mortal remnant of Aaron, wrongly supposed to be Melchisedek. The sea had washed up its dead.

Achmet stayed a good two hours thinking, lurking, waiting, and planning a shameful, indecent, vengeful jest on the Governor who had thrown words of contumely at him and tried to tear off his head. Once he hastily covered the body of Aaron with sand, and hid the stolen papers in a clump of seaweed, and waded out till only his nose appeared above the water, and stood there counting the Governor's minions as they clattered by searching the shore. When they had faded in the distance he lifted all that remained of Aaron and carried it with infinite precaution into his Excellency's garden. In dead silence—a silence deader even than Aaron—he left his burden up against his Excellency's private door. Then, from a fairly long range, he hurled rocks at his Excellency's window. And when the Governor tore the door open



for the second time that night it happened for the second time that an unexpected visitant fell in. This time the clamor of the Turkish functionary could be heard from Dan to Beersheba, and again Achmet had to run for his life. He didn't care to take the shore road again, and the narrow ways of the town seemed too dangerous, so he fled towards the hills.

#### IV.

It was nearly the beginning of dawn when the Algerine rounded the last corner on the way home, with a bullet about two inches behind him. Juan Barrios, who had spent the night lurking in the shadows of his garden ready to take any intruder in the rear, and who had twice been shot at in a random fashion, emptied his gun in the direction from which the attack came, but apparently without result. He listened to Achmet's narrative with inward misgiving but outward applause. During the night all his Arab servants had vanished, and his bread supply had been cut off, and it was evidently not the right time to tell his wild but moderately faithful attendant that he was a fool with a depraved sense of humor. Faithful attendants were becoming too scarce. So he rewarded him further, according to the scale of wages prevailing in these parts, and spoke words of encouragement.

That day was the last of the feud. A few hours later the healing palm branch of peace was extended to all parties concerned.

About noon, Barrios, with Achmet in close attendance, made a strategic retreat to the house of the Consul for Mitylene, a good reliable friend who dwelt close to the harbor. His position near the harbor was even more valuable than his friendship.

It was the day when the Austrian steamer called in for an hour or two on its way to Constantinople. Barrios took it for granted that his correspondence was stopped at the Post Office both outward and



inward—or rather that it was steamed, opened and copied. So under the hospitable roof of the Representative of Mitylene he wrote a full account of the infamies, plots, conspiracies and frauds of the Turkish Governor at Jabesh. He enclosed the Governor's letters which Achmet had stolen as he leaped for the window, just before he fled along the shore and fell over the unfortunate remains of Aaron who was wrongly supposed to be Melchisedek, and some of these letters were loaded. He sealed the packet and addressed it to the Galatian Ministry at Constantinople, with an order that it was to be opened only on the receipt of news of his death or disappearance. Then the whole able-bodied force which he and the Consul for Mitylene could raise went to the steamer per boat, and bade the Austrian captain deliver the packet (for a consideration) and guard it as he would his life (for a further consideration). The packet reached its destination, too, though the Austrian captain was sandbagged in his own cabin by an earnest searcher who got nothing for his pains.

Barrios loafed on the premises of his friend till the moon rose. Then he started for home along the beach, smoking a cigar and apparently buried in contemplation. If he looked a shade more bulky than usual it may be that the wearing of a mail shirt accounted for it. Far behind lurked two armed Greeks whom he had borrowed from the Consul for Mitylene.

There was a certain spot where the sandhills came down close to the shore, and there Barrios quickened his pace. It seemed a dangerous kind of spot. But however fast a Consul may be a bullet is faster, and when there came a glare of flame and a sudden report from behind a sand hummock, the Representative of Galatia threw up his arms, ran a few steps and fell as a tower falls. He remained quite still.

His assailant came out at a swift stealthy run, possibly to search the body; possibly to make quite sure of the deadness of the body. Thereupon Achmet

opened fire, earnestly and steadily, from the top of the sandhills. His first shot only raised a puff of sand. At his second the running man stumbled, turned a complete somersault, and fell, his gun flying promiscuously across the landscape. Then the Consul rose, spat out a mouthful of sand, and took stock of the situation. The landscape, he found, was filled with sudden animation. Two men were legging it in haste over the sand hills like individuals whose schemes had gone astray. The two Greeks borrowed from the Consul for Mitylene were coming up at the canter affected by men who run against their will and would fain be in safer quarters. There seemed to be one or two misty figures behind them. And Achmet had gone mad with rage and blood lust. He was coming down hill like a whirlwind, waving his gun by the barrel, and propounding that he would batter his victim out of recognition. This by no means suited the policy of his employer, who always made it a rule to identify his victims if possible. Barrios shouted to the enthusiast to be calm. He issued an imperative command that he should stand off. He threatened him, all in a second, with arrest, sack, reduction of salary, stoppage of perquisites and sudden death. And then he closed with him and took him by the throat.

It was the two Greeks from Mitylene who dragged them apart. The Consul got up, breathing heavily and feeling that faithful followers are sometimes a mistake. Achmet, his sudden frenzy over, offered a perfunctory apology. Finally Barrios had time to inspect the fallen enemy. He was the Governor's nephew, and he was not dead nor even seriously wounded. The bullet had wrecked his fez, and cut a groove in his scalp, and temporarily obliterated his faculties. Barrios drew a long sigh of relief as he sized up the situation. At the same time his nerves were all frayed and on end with worry, and the fact that some one was breathing heavily on his neck



filled him with sudden unreasoning rage. He felt that he would gladly kill any borrowed Greek from Mitylene who breathed on his neck at that moment, and he turned with a snarl bidding him stand further off. He told the Greek to face towards the sea and breathe at Gibraltar. And then he found himself looking straight into the haggard face and staring eyes of Melchisedek.

It seemed such an impossible situation that the Consul proceeded to enumerate the company by way of making sure. The Governor's nephew lying on the sand was one. Achmet was two—Achmet, by the way, was gone at the knees and looked like a man who was visited by a ghost, but then it was only twenty hours since Achmet had, by his own calculation, most irreverently left Melchisedek in the Governor's verandah, so his agitation was only natural. The two borrowed Greeks from Mitylene made four—and they also looked as if scared out of their wits. He himself was five—he counted himself twice to make certain that he was really there. When Melchisedek was added the party numbered six. If the two men who had legged it in frantic retreat over the sand hills had remained, the little crowd standing in the moonlight on the wide silvery beach of Jabesh would have counted eight.

He pulled himself together and taking Melchisedek aside asked for an explanation. That wretched fugitive supplied it with tears. Boiled down it amounted to this. He had got away after dark as already stated, and by the aid of the Syrian clerk at the telegraph office—the one who had charged double rates for the message calling on the clan at Gaza to come to Jabesh and avenge their relative. He retired with about three hundred pounds and a light heart, leaving Aaron in the lurch. But the Syrian clerk had arranged for leave of absence and had waited for him outside the town. His life since then had been a hell owing to the treachery of the Syrian



clerk. He had given that wretch half his wealth to induce him to go back and keep silence. The Syrian had taken the money with fair promises, and then had still walked with him and demanded more. Finally he had intimated that he would see what reward could be got from the police for the surrender of Melchisedek. This haunting Syrian apparition had prevented Melchisedek enjoying his meals. He was rapidly being reduced to a skeleton. He was unarmed and he wasn't half the size of his persecutor. He had become such a wreck that his clothes didn't fit him any more. He was going back to give himself up because he wanted to be hanged among the scenes of his childhood, but he thought he would prefer to drown himself. His relentless enemy, he said, was still on his track, and he indicated a figure that had hovered nearer and nearer, and which stood in a hesitating attitude, balanced now on one leg and now on the other, about a hundred yards away.

Barrios looked with disgust on his resurrected subject, and asked himself again if any other Consul had such folk to look after. Still something had to be done. His first idea was to clear the atmosphere, and it was plain that the atmosphere would be clearer if the Syrian clerk was got rid of. Achmet, judging by his recent ferocity, was plainly the man to get rid of him. At the same time he felt that the strain on Achmet's fidelity was becoming severe, and that it might be advisable to raise his hopes and expectations with further bribes in the present and extra promises in the future. If the handy homicide were to sell out to the Governor just at this moment Barrios didn't quite know where he would stand.

He searched the clothes of the Governor's nephew, who was still insensible, and found nine pounds of Egyptian money. Of this he offered five pounds to the Algerian provided he would: (1) run swiftly and overtake the Syrian telegraph clerk; (2) assault him; (3) get him down and rob him of all his money and

valuables; (4) lift him up and assault him again; (5) start him on a terrified run in the direction of Europe; and (6) bring back, and faithfully account for, the property discovered on the defendant. And while Achmet was away doing these things, amid a cloud of flying sand, he divided the other four pounds between the two borrowed Greeks from Mitylene as an inducement to silence, and promised them each, provided they were faithful, a handsome pension chargeable on the revenues of Galatia, which pension, it is needless to say, never eventuated. It was commuted in the end for two nickel watches.

Then, the Syrian clerk having limped away northward, penniless and with great lamentations, and Achmet having handed to his employer all the money, save about five pounds, found upon that representative of a degenerate race, and the Governor's nephew showing signs of returning consciousness, it was considered time to move. So the nephew was gagged and bound, and as Melchisedek was quite useless for fighting purposes, he was turned into a beast of burden and forced to carry the wounded man, who was much above his weight. And with Barrios in front, and Achmet for rearguard, and the two loaned Greeks of Mitylene as flanking parties, the expedition arrived safely. The house was searched for possible enemies, and then Barrios got down to business. He restored his captive with strong liquor and demanded that he should write a letter to his uncle.

The captive flatly refused to write anything. He said the Consul dared not detain him and that he had ten policemen to prove his innocence of any charge whatsoever.

Barrios spoke softly in reply. He pointed out that the letter he proposed was perfectly harmless. It was, in fact, more than harmless. If the prisoner would state on paper where he was, and explain that he was in fair health and receiving good treatment, and urge his uncle to find, if possible, some means of



reconciliation, the Consul for Galatia undertook to deliver the document and do his utmost to smooth away all causes of offence and estrangement. The feud, he said, was too exciting for a man of his years, and he wanted peace. He was willing to make all possible concessions. At the same time he rather implied than declared that if the feud with the Governor was to continue, and he found himself burdened with a prisoner whom he couldn't retain because he would be in the way, and whom he couldn't afford to let go—he made a motion which seemed to carelessly suggest burial or something. So, being much persuaded, the confinee wrote the letter in a large, clumsy hand. He started in Arabic, but Barrios demanded that he should write in French on the ground that he knew no Arabic, and desired to read the script, and satisfy himself that no hidden snare was laid for him. It is a side issue that Arabic, like shorthand, is a form of writing in which one hand is amazingly like another, and identification of the writer is not easy.

Then Barrios composed quite a different letter in which the nephew gave away his uncle's crimes and treasons and extortions in a shocking fashion. He put the two before Melchisedek and explained the situation briefly to that wretched person. If he (Melchisedek) could produce a copy of the second letter in such an accurate imitation of the handwriting of the first that it could pass even in a Court of Law as the act and deed of the Governor's nephew, then Juan Barrios undertook, on the honor of a Frank, to return Melchisedek such of his moneys as had been recovered from the Syrian clerk, now fleeing northward in great disorder, and to smuggle him securely upon the first boat that left for any place outside Turkish jurisdiction. Failing that, the police would attend promptly to the execution of Melchisedek, which event would be prefaced by tortures. And though Melchisedek protested that crime was unknown



to him, and that he had pursued the narrow path of rectitude and walked the strict chalk line of honor since his infancy, he did the work after the manner of a finished artist. Barrios witnessed the forged signature. The two Greeks from Mitylene attested that it had been written and signed in their presence by the Governor's nephew, and Achmet guaranteed everything.

That day the trouble was patched up and peace was restored. Leaving Achmet in charge of the prisoner, Barrios called with an escort on the Turkish Governor, who had just finished burying Aaron and was in bad state of agitation about current happenings and mysteries. He showed him the letter of denunciation which, he explained, the nephew had written as the price of his own safety, and remarked that the other incriminating papers and evidences had gone into safe-keeping abroad. Provided that terms could be arranged they would never be used unless the Consul for Galatia came to harm, but if that unhappy event took place the bomb would explode on the instant, and the Sultan's vengeance would assuredly tear the Governor into eight pieces. Barrios was also prepared, on second thoughts and after due consideration, to commute the death of Melchisedek for a very moderate money payment. In return he required that Galatian subjects should have preference in any Government contracts that might be going; that the police should have strict orders to grovel when any Galatian went by; and that his Excellency should write an order for the expulsion of his degenerate nephew from the province and lend a police escort to hunt him over the border. Such a nephew, he pointed out, could be easily spared; in fact if the Governor felt he couldn't get on without a nephew, a better sample could be bought anywhere. Barrios also presented a bill for four pounds, being expenses of the campaign. Lastly he demanded that, whenever his Excellency had any swindle, fraud or

profitable deed of oppression on, he should be allowed to participate to the extent of one-fourth. At the same time he promised to so improve the mechanism of the swindle that the Governor would gain rather than lose by taking in a partner, for, as he explained, Abdul Gallows was so badly served that every time he stole a shilling his subordinates intercepted ninepence of it. Barrios proposed to reduce the old shilling steal to tenpence in order to gain popularity with the masses. Out of this the Governor was to get at least fivepence. Barrios would get his share out of the balance, or strictly investigate the reason why. To all of which his Excellency assented with reservations.

So the Consul for Galatia scattered his enemies. Giaffar, the astonished nephew, was rudely hunted across the Jordan by the same police officer who had slain Badral Bey. On the bank of the sacred river the officer shook his fist at Giaffar—who utterly failed to understand the situation, seeing that he had squared the police before he went out to murder Barrios—and bade him keep away for ever under pain of battle, murder and sudden death. And it was only after the officer had left him that Giaffar felt in his clothes and discovered that Barrios had embezzled all his money.

Melchisedek got back his cash, less a commission to Achmet, and was started off by night for Jerusalem and parts beyond.

Aaron obligingly remained dead.

And after that the days of Juan Barrios were long in the land. But he walked circumspectly and never demanded satisfaction for the death of a Galatian subject unless he was quite certain that that Galatian subject was dead. And while he and the Governor remained together at Jabesh they were great friends, and his Excellency often drank coffee at the Consul's house. But the Consul never drank coffee at his Excellency's house, for he knew what was in his own

coffee, while the possible contents of his Excellency's coffee were a matter of surmise. True, the incriminating documents which lay under seal in the Ministry at Constantinople were always a tower of strong defence, but Barrios didn't put complete faith in documents. He would have preferred a more material assurance—and unfortunately the Galatian ironclad which went to the ironmonger's to be soled and heeled never came back. In the end it was seized for the unpaid bill and sold to some nigger government on an island.











